

# BishopAccountability.org

---

## **Bishop: Priest Violated Vow**

Diocese Says Pastor Takes Leave after Admitting Sex with RPI Student, Second Man

By Mike Goodwin  
Times Union (Albany, NY)  
November 17, 2003

Albany A Roman Catholic priest has taken a leave of absence after he admitted he had sexual relations with an 18-year-old student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and another man in the 1980s, the Diocese of Albany announced Sunday. The Rev. Charles R. Celeste, the pastor at Holy Family Parish in Little Falls, asked for the leave of absence after Randall Sweringen, a 38-year-old man who now lives in Berkeley, Calif., went public last week with an accusation that Celeste sexually abused him from 1984 to 1987, when he attended RPI.

"Father Celeste has acknowledged that his conduct was inappropriate and wrong. A priest must not violate his vow of celibacy, nor compromise his position of sacred trust in the community," Bishop Howard Hubbard said in a statement.

"Father Celeste and I believe that the recent public attention makes it impossible for him to conduct an effective ministry at this time."

Celeste admitted he had sexual relations with the college student and another man during the 1980s, but has been celibate since, said Diocese Chancellor Rev. Kenneth Boyle. Church officials declined to give details of the other relationship.

Last Monday, Sweringen charged that the diocese ignored its own rules on clergy abuse by not suspending Celeste after he first contacted the church in August. Celeste was the chaplain to the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity, where Sweringen was a member. Sweringen was 18 when he met Celeste, who at the time lived in the rectory of nearby St. Paul the Apostle Church.

After Sweringen spoke at a news conference, the diocese issued a five-sentence statement that called the sexual activity for a priest inappropriate, but added that "the Diocesan Review Panel did not recommend that the priest be removed from ministry." Celeste could eventually return to active ministry, Doyle said, adding that the review panel will again investigate the case.

Sweringen's attorney, John Aretakis, said the diocese only took action after Sweringen went public. He claims the diocese initially offered to pay for 10 counseling sessions and then increased the offer to 20 sessions. "They were going to bury it," he said in an interview Sunday.

In a statement sent to reporters, Aretakis said Hubbard "instinctively protects dangerous priests. Our communities are safer today not because of the leadership of Bishop Hubbard ... but because of the courage of Randy Sweringen."

Sweringen is now openly gay, but denied that he and the priest were involved in a consensual affair, though he never refused Celeste's advances. Sweringen said he did not report the alleged abuse at the time because he was "overpowered" by Celeste's "spiritual authority over me." He said he tried to forget what had happened until the sexual abuse scandals surfaced in the Boston Archdiocese two years ago. He said he contacted the diocese because "I never want this to happen to another person again."

Sweringen is director of alumni and church relations at the Pacific School of Religion, a multi-

denominational Christian seminary in Berkley. He has not filed a lawsuit against either Celeste or the diocese.

Since June 2002, at least 14 priests from the Albany Diocese have left the ministry following allegations of sexual misconduct.

---

Any original material on these pages is copyright © BishopAccountability.org 2004. Reproduce freely with attribution.