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Review Board Actions

Diocese restores two priests, removes Herkimer pastor

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Two Albany diocesan priests have been cleared and one has been removed from ministry after investigations into separate allegations that they sexually abused minors.

The Diocesan Review Board, the panel that investigates sexual abuse complaints against priests and deacons, found there was no evidence to support an allegation against Rev. Donald Ophals, pastor of St. Francis de Sales parish in Troy, and Rev. Louis Douglas, a retired priest living in Delaware.

The Review Board began its investigation in May 2003 when the two priests were among four named in a lawsuit filed by attorney John Aretakis. The plaintiff was an adult male who said that he was abused as a teenager in the 1970s in a rectory in Schenectady.

The lawsuit itself was dismissed in January by Acting State Supreme Court Justice Barry Kramer.

Back in ministry

Father Ophals requested and was granted a leave of absence while the Review Board investigation was conducted. He has resumed all of his duties as St. Francis.

Father Douglas had retired from the Albany Diocese and was working part-time as a priest in Delaware. When the allegations were made, he was suspended from his part-time ministry by the Diocese of Wilmington.

In 1992, the Albany Diocese received an unrelated complaint against Father Douglas involving an alleged incident in the 1960s. The allegation was investigated twice -- in 1992 by the Diocese and again in 2002 by the Diocesan Review Board. Both investigations reached the same conclusion: based on the evidence, no sexual abuse occurred.

Nevertheless, the Albany Diocese provided financial assistance and counseling to the individual who made the complaint about Father Douglas. Father Douglas retired in 1993. The Albany Diocese notified the Wilmington Diocese of both the 1992 and 2003 complaints and investigations.

On hold

A third priest named in the Schenectady lawsuit, Rev. Alan Jupin, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima parish in Schenectady, remains on voluntary leave from ministry.

The Review Board investigation of Father Jupin is continuing. He will remain on leave until the investigation is completed.

The fourth individual identified in the lawsuit as a priest is, in fact, not a priest of the Albany Diocese, and his identity and whereabouts have not been determined. He did not appear in court when the lawsuit was heard. Nevertheless, the judge dismissed the complaint against him as well.

Removal

In a separate action, Bishop Howard J. Hubbard has removed from ministry Rev. Robert S. Shinos, pastor of Ss. Anthony and Joseph Parish in Herkimer.

The Diocesan Review Board determined there was reasonable cause to believe an allegation of sexual abuse against Father Shinos. The allegation involved an incident in the 1960s in Albany. The allegation has been under investigation by the Review Board since it was received in January.

Father Shinos had served as pastor in Herkimer since 1977. He was ordained in 1963, and had also served at St. Bernard's in Cohoes and St. Patrick's in Watervliet.

Parishioners of Ss. Anthony and Joseph Parish have been informed of Bishop Hubbard's decision. The Diocese will be working closely with parish leaders to ensure that there is appropriate coverage for Masses and other sacraments until a new pastor is appointed.

Zero tolerance

The Albany Diocese has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse by clergy. No priest can remain in public ministry or can be transferred into, out of or within the Diocese if an allegation of sexual abuse against him at any time has been substantiated.

The Diocese urges anyone who, as a child, was sexually abused by a Catholic priest or deacon to come forward for help.

To report an incident of abuse or to seek help, contact the Diocese's assistance coordinator, Theresa F. Rodrigues, at (518) 453-6646 or by e-mail at victim.assistance@rcda.org.

Statistics

The decision involving Father Shinos brings to 19 the number of Albany Diocesan priests who have been removed from ministry since 1950 because the Diocese found reasonable cause to believe they had sexually abused a minor. That figure represents two percent of the diocesan priests in ministry during that 54-year period.

The decisions involving Fathers Ophals and Douglas bring to 15 the number of accused priests who have been cleared.

The Review Board continues to investigate allegations against 11 current and former clerics. The Diocese created the Review Board in 1993 with the responsibility of investigating allegations of sexual misconduct against priests in the Albany Diocese.

Its members are Hon. Jaclyn Brilling, an attorney and officer of the New York State Public Service Commission; Rev. Geoffrey Burke, pastor of Our Lady of Assumption parish in Latham; Rev. Michael Farano, pastor of St. Pius X Church in Loudonville; Kevin Glasheen of Albany, an attorney; Margaret Griffin, RN, a nurse practitioner; Kathryn Martin, a certified social worker; Catherine Rooney, RN, a retired psychiatric nurse, and Christopher Rutnik, an attorney and former Albany County assistant district attorney.

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