

# BishopAccountability.org

---

## Bishop Addresses Dismissals

By Jay Tokasz and Lou Michel  
Buffalo News [Buffalo NY]  
September 11, 2003

Although priests have been removed recently from their ministries, the sexual abuse allegations against them are more than a decade old and the priests went through rehabilitation, Bishop Henry J. Mansell said Wednesday.

But the rehabilitation programs do not meet new guidelines that the national bishops conference adopted earlier this year, Mansell said in his weekday Mass homily.

The remarks were the bishop's first in public since revealing in a written statement Tuesday that unnamed priests had been removed from active ministry.

"It's important to understand that these are not recent incidents. They go back some time. The allegations took place in the '80s and '70s and before that," he said.

Mansell also emphasized that none of the accused priests was simply transferred from one parish to another after an allegation.

In each case, he said, the priest received six or seven months of treatment, "sometimes longer," followed by after-care and supervision.

"It was only at the recommendation, in fact the strong advice, of the rehabilitation institute that these priests were reassigned to active ministry," said Mansell. "But that no longer is enough."

Mansell said the diocese was fully complying with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, a blueprint instructing bishops on how to handle allegations of sexual abuse.

The charter calls for the review of all diocesan personnel files and for the removal of any priest "for even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor, past, present or future."

Two auditors hired by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops were in Buffalo on Wednesday to investigate whether the diocese is implementing the charter properly.

They met with Erie County District Attorney Frank J. Clark to discuss relations between his office and the diocese.

"We talked for 30 minutes, and I hope it was helpful and enlightening to the lay auditors," Clark said. "I have consistently said that historically my relationship with the diocese has always been open and above board, and I have never felt the diocese has tried to conceal or distort facts."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops hired the Gavin Group of Boston to analyze compliance in the nation's 195 Catholic dioceses and eparchies.

The audits have been ongoing since late June, and reports from the audits will be forwarded to Kathleen McChesney, executive director of the Office of Child & Youth Protection of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. McChesney, a former administrator with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, will then write an overall report that will be released to the public based on the diocesan audits.

"The auditors were businesslike, and I'm sure they will be seeing a number of people," Clark said of their review, though he did not know if they planned to interview local victims of sexual abuse by Catholic clergymen.

The auditors, he said, did not ask him about specific cases of alleged abuse.

The district attorney was notified Tuesday morning by Monsignor Robert J. Cunningham, the diocesan chancellor, that action had recently been taken against two priests.

"Monsignor Cunningham advised me that they were taking action on two priests. I didn't ask for any details, and they didn't volunteer any," Clark said. "In each case, the allegations had occurred many, many years before, well outside the statute of limitations."

The statute of limitations for sexual attacks on children and most other crimes is five years in New York State.

In his remarks, which lasted about six minutes, Mansell did not reveal the names of the priests who had been removed.

"We have asked for the resignations of some priests over recent times because of involvement with sexual abuse of minors," he said.

Diocesan officials would not elaborate, beyond Mansell's homily remarks, on the recent removals.

"We're staying with the statement we issued (Tuesday)," said diocesan spokesman Kevin A. Keenan.

But within the past month, two rural parish priests were removed abruptly from their ministries under unusual circumstances.

About three weeks ago, the Rev. Robert Wood was removed as pastor of St. Joseph Church in Varysburg, where he had served since 2001.

The Rev. Thomas McCarthy, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in West Valley, retired suddenly Aug. 26, following a meeting with diocesan officials, according to parishioners.

An anonymous flier circulating in neighborhoods near St. John the Baptist Church in the Town of Tonawanda, where McCarthy had served as an associate pastor in the 1990s, accuses the priest of misdeeds during his time there.

The Tonawanda parish's current pastor, the Rev. Richard Reina, sent a letter to parishioners Wednesday stating that the flier contained "very damaging, false accusations" against McCarthy.

"Monsignor Robert Cunningham, the vicar general for the diocese, has informed me that no allegations of sexual abuse were ever made to the chancery against Father Tom while he was stationed at St. John's," Reina wrote.

Reina also said there "was never a hint of any abuse" as the reason for McCarthy's transfer from Tonawanda.

Also Wednesday, Clark said his office is close to an agreement with the diocese on how church officials would inform authorities of instances of alleged sexual abuse involving diocesan workers.

"The major portion of the agreement is done, and we're ironing out one final paragraph," Clark said. "I'm optimistic the agreement will be signed by the end of the month."