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Priest with troubled past removed from St. Benedict's

By John Desio
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An parental uproar in Throggs Neck this past week led to the removal of a local pastor based on allegations of past improper sexual conduct with young boys.

Rev. Gennaro Gentile, the new pastor of St. Benedict's in Throggs Neck, had been implicated in a string of child abuse incidents while pastor of the Holy Name of Mary Church, in the Croton-on-Hudson section of Westchester, the post he had held previous to St. Benedict's.

According to a series of article's in The Journal News, a Westchester daily, dozens of counts were filed against the priest, alleging that the had sexually suggestive contact with several boys.

Most of the counts have been dismissed, largely due to the statute of limitations having passed, but one count still remains against Gentile.

The final count against Gentile, which has not been dismissed, alleges that the pastor committed civil assault and battery against the then 13 year old son of Vincent and Patricia Nauheimer by caressing his shoulders, neck, and hair.

Other charges include the accusation of one former altar boy, who claimed that Gentile tried to remove his pajama bottoms on a camping trip nearly three decades ago, as well as the claims of a former parishioner at Holy Name, who stated that she saw Gentile give an intense massage to a shirtless boy.

While at St. Benedict's, Gentile was rumored to be accompanied at all times by a monitor, an obvious sign that the Archdiocese recognized a potential problem.

When parents first learned of these allegations this past week, they organized a meeting, which was closed to the press, to discuss their course of action in this matter.

Parents agreed to begin a "stern letter writing campaign," as one mother in attendance at the meeting described it, to remove the accused pedophile from the school and church.

"As parents and parishioners of St. Benedict's Parish, we are extremely upset to have read about the sexual allegations made against Father Gennaro Gentile," stated the letter.

The parishioners do state in the letter that they hoped Gentile received the help that he needed, but reiterated that St. Benedict's as not the proper place for the pastor.

"As Christians, we pray that Father Gentile receives the help that he needs," states the letter, "however, our children's safety is our first priority."

The letter added, "we demand the removal of Father Gentile from our parish as soon as possible."

The letter also pointed to recent developments at the parish in the past year, namely the loss of two pastors at St. Benedict's. "Considering what we have been through this past year with the death of our pastor, Father Kenneth Marks, and the sudden departure of our new pastor, Father Anthony Sorgie,

our parish does not need any further turmoil," says the letter.

Parents had planned to send the letter to Cardinal Edward Egan, chief of the Archdiocese of New York, as well as to several other representatives of the Archdiocese and the Catholic school system.

In addition to the letter writing campaign, parents at the meeting vowed to hold back monetary contributions to the parish until the issue was resolved, and debated holding their children from school until Gentile was removed.

Another mother, who refused to be identified, spoke after the meeting, describing the Archdiocese as "insane" for bringing Gentile to St. Benedict's.

"Its obvious that this priest has or had a problem, what would make them think that they could bring him here," said the mother.

She added that the parish had been planning a summer camping trip with Gentile for some of the children of the parish, but stated that "you can be sure my son won't be there." Still, the mother was hopeful that Gentile would get the help that he needed.

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