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Vatican Defrocks 6 Local Priests

By Gary Stern
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Six Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of New York have been defrocked by the Vatican for sexually abusing minors, becoming the first accused priests in the region to have their fates decided since the scandal of 2002.

A seventh priest who was not defrocked was assigned to live out his life in prayer and penance.

The priests, five of whom served at some point in Westchester, Rockland or Putnam counties, all had their cases heard by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the archdiocese announced yesterday in the July edition of Catholic New York, its official publication.

About two dozen cases of alleged abuse by priests have been awaiting a final ruling by the Vatican. There is no timetable for when the Vatican might rule on outstanding cases, said Joseph Zwilling, spokesman for the archdiocese.

"At this point, these are all of the cases that we have received an answer about," he said.

The former priests, all now "reduced to the lay state," according to the archdiocese, are:

- Daniel Calabrese, a former priest at St. Mary's Church in Poughkeepsie. He was convicted in 1992 of sodomizing a teenage boy in Dutchess County and was removed from ministry. In recent years, he has been living in New Mexico.
- David Carson, a former priest on Staten Island and at St. Paul's Church in Congers. He has been out of ministry for several years. No accusations against him have been made public.
- Kenneth Jesselli, a former pastor of Holy Name of Mary Church in Croton-on-Hudson. He was removed from ministry in April 2002, but any allegations against him have not been made public. Jesselli's predecessor at Holy Name of Mary, the Rev. Gennaro Gentile, has also been removed from ministry because of allegations of abuse, but his case has not yet been decided by the Vatican.
- Ralph LaBelle, a former pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Putnam Lake. He was removed in April 2002 after allegations surfaced of a nonsexual but inappropriate relationship with a teenage boy.
- Patrick Quigley, a former associate pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Stony Point. He pleaded guilty in December 1994 to a misdemeanor charge after admitting he had offered to pay several boys for sex in Haverstraw village. He was removed from ministry and sent for psychiatric treatment.
- Francis Stinner, a former pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Bronxville. Despite insisting on his innocence, he left the parish in 1997 after several men accused him of abusing them decades before in Orange County. At the time, the archdiocese acknowledged paying for therapy, college and a new car for Stinner's main accuser. Stinner continued to celebrate Mass at

several local parishes until the archdiocese told him to stop in 2002.

These priests may have agreed to leave the priesthood or could have been defrocked against their will, said Monsignor Ronny Jenkins of Catholic University, an adviser to the U.S. Bishops Conference on sex-abuse cases.

"The congregation is picking up some steam," he said. "Decisions are coming out at a pretty good pace."

The priest who was allowed to remain in the priesthood but was assigned to a life of prayer and penance, apart from public ministry, is the Rev. Alfred Gallant. He served as pastor of Infant Saviour Church in Pine Bush, Orange County, until being removed in 2002, but no public allegations against him have surfaced.

His brother, the Rev. John Gallant, was also removed from ministry in 2002. He was pastor of St. Joan of Arc Church in Sloatsburg and acknowledged having a past affair with a young woman. The woman said she was a 16-year-old student of his when the priest initiated a relationship in 1978.

John Gallant's case is also, apparently, among those not yet decided by the Vatican.

David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said the Vatican's decisions on abuse cases have been slowly seeping out. But dioceses have been providing little public information about the accused priests, their offenses or their whereabouts.

"It's a painfully slow process, and, typically, the dioceses don't go out of their way to tell us about these dangerous guys," Clohessy said. "From our perspective, defrocking a child molester is the first step, not the last step, that the church should take. We believe the archbishop should work very hard to reach out to those who may have been hurt by these men and to warn and educate the public about them."

Generally, dioceses do not keep track of former priests who have been defrocked. Only those who have been convicted of crimes are required by law enforcement agencies to register as sex offenders.

The priests whose cases reached the Vatican were all judged to be guilty of abuse by an archdiocesan lay review board. Cardinal Edward Egan complied with the board's judgments before forwarding the cases to Rome.

Among the priests whose cases have not been decided by the Vatican, in addition to Gentile and John Gallant, are: the Rev. John Lennon, former pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Yonkers; the Rev. Lawrence Inzeo, former pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church in West Harrison; and, perhaps the best-known, Monsignor Charles Kavanagh, former vicar of development for the archdiocese and former pastor of St. Raymond's Church in the Bronx.

"We've very, very frustrated," said Ann Mandt, one of Kavanagh's sisters. "It's taken too long. The process is not just."

Defrocked priests

- Daniel Calabrese, a former priest at St. Mary's Church in Poughkeepsie
- David Carson, a former priest at St. Paul's Church in Congers
- Kenneth Jesselli, a former pastor of Holy Name of Mary Church in Croton-on-Hudson
- Ralph LaBelle, a former pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Putnam Lake

- Patrick Quigley, a former associate pastor of the Immaculate Conception Church in Stony Point
- Francis Stinner, a former pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Bronxville

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