

BishopAccountability.org

2 Priests Who Quit Have Ties to City David Simon Is a Former Parishioner at Church Where Foster Rogers Was Pastor

By Juliana Gittler
Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY)
May 4, 2002

Two of three priests who resigned from their Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester parish jobs Thursday amid sexual abuse allegations had ties to Auburn.

But the alleged incidents did not occur locally, according to a Rochester newspaper.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark of the Rochester diocese Thursday asked the priests, who were suspected of sexually abusing teen-agers "more than 20 years ago," to resign. The action came after church officials reviewed diocese files following a request by the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, the paper reported Thursday.

Clark said that although no allegations have surfaced since concerning the three, he decided they should not continue in their ministry.

The three are the Rev. Foster P. Rogers of St. Pius X Church in Chili, near Rochester; the Rev. Thomas Burr of St. Mary Our Mother Church in Horseheads, Chemung County; and the Rev. David Simon of St. Paul's Church in Webster, also near Rochester.

One of the priests, Rogers, served as pastor of St. Alphonsus Church in Auburn for nearly 20 years before being transferred in 1998 to St. Pius X.

The Democrat and Chronicle reported that Rogers was accused of abusing a 16-year-old boy while at a church in Fairport in 1975.

Rogers was transferred to Auburn's St. Alphonsus Church on East Genesee Street as an assistant pastor in 1979, and became pastor in 1986.

Diocese officials in Rochester did not respond to calls Friday seeking information about the abuse claims or the priests' resignations. Rogers could also not be reached.

A second priest who resigned, Simon, is a former Auburn resident and former parishioner of St. Alphonsus Church, according to the current parish priest, the Rev. Louis Vasile.

Simon was pastor in Webster until his suspension. He did not serve locally, and no specific allegations were reported concerning him by the Democrat and Chronicle. Simon's relatives in Auburn declined comment Friday.

Parishioners at St. Alphonsus Friday continued to express disbelief about any allegations concerning Rogers, a well-liked priest who spearheaded many church projects, organizations and activities.

"It is very hard for me to believe this has happened," said Mildred Clark, a parishioner for more than 55 years, who said she knew Rogers well. "He was a very good person. He was just the ideal priest."

Vasile, who replaced Rogers at St. Alphonsus in June 1998, said he's known him since 1964 in the seminary.

"He was always a deeply spiritual and pastoral person. A great sense of humor. A very charismatic sort of person," Vasile said.

Among his accomplishments, he said, was the starting of a Sunday evening Mass at the church, the opening of the church's rectory to retired priests and a Wednesday lunch for local priests at the church.

"And the regional Catholic school is here (grades 1 through 8) because of his initiative," Vasile said. "Talk to people here. (Rogers) was responsible for rejuvenating, rehabilitating and renovating the community in various ways - physically, as well as spiritually."

Vasile said he went to school with Simon. "We both went to Mount Carmel High School. He was three years ahead of me in the seminary.

"He acted with integrity. I never, ever heard any allegations against him. He always operated above board and was respected."

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