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## Diocese Had Priest Warning

By Gary Craig  
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Counselors at a Maryland psychiatric center for priests recommended in a 2002 report to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester that the Rev. Michael Volino should be restricted from ministry involving children.

The counselors also cautioned against allowing Volino, a Greece-based priest, to work in schools and recommended that he have no unsupervised contact with children.

These recommendations, also included in the report by St. Luke's Institute, a church-run facility outside Washington in Silver Spring, Md., apparently did not deter the diocese from permitting Volino to continue as a practicing priest within the Monroe County community.

But now, with Volino's recent arrest on child pornography charges, the diocese finds itself having to confront whether it closed its eyes to the possibility that Volino posed a threat to youngsters.

Portions of the report - which was not released to the public - were read publicly by U.S. Magistrate Judge Jonathan Feldman at a Monday court hearing.

In 2002, Volino underwent behavioral evaluations at St. Luke's for a week at the behest of the diocese. St. Luke's treats priests who suffer from addictions - including alcohol, drugs or pedophilia.

In a prepared statement Monday, the diocese did acknowledge asking Volino to undergo assessment at St. Luke's.

However, the statement said, "The referral and assessment were related to behavioral issues and not to sexual abuse."

"The recommendations of the St. Luke's staff were not issued in the context of a person who was sexually abusive," the diocese's statement also said. "However, the Diocese failed to adequately monitor the follow through of some of the recommendations.

"The report did not give any finding, nor did the Diocese interpret any indication, that Fr. Volino would be a danger to anyone. Review of the monitoring process is already underway within the diocese to ensure that more stringent procedures are put in place."

The diocese would not address what "behavioral issues" prompted it to ask Volino to undergo an assessment at St. Luke's.

Volino has been a priest at St. John the Evangelist Church of Greece, 2400 W. Ridge Road, since 2002. He previously served at St. Lawrence Church in Greece and St. Theodore Church in Gates, according to the diocese. Volino is now on administrative leave and is not allowed to engage in public ministry.

Mark Furnish, an Albany-based lawyer who alleges that he was a victim of priest abuse in Greece when he was a teen in the 1980s, said the diocese's lapses could have endangered children.

"They should have been hyper-cognizant of any kind of problems with their priests by the time he was there and when he got back," Furnish said about the response from the diocese to Volino's treatment at St. Luke's. "This is not 1973 we're talking about.

"You'd have to be living under a rock not to know the problems that have been going on with the clergy sex abuse scandal."

Both diocesan officials and federal authorities stress that Volino, 41, has not been accused of sexual abuse, and that there has not been any evidence to date that he has had improper contact with children. But Judge Feldman on Monday ruled that Volino should be confined at an Elmira-based monastery as he awaits trial, just to ensure that children are not at risk.

Feldman, basing his ruling on St. Luke's 2002 findings, said that there was "a potential danger" with Volino. He said he may reconsider the decision to confine Volino to the monastery, especially if it becomes even more clear that Volino never had improper contact with children.

'Priest-phobia'

Last week, the diocese reported that it had no information that Volino had undergone any counseling connected to any fixations with child pornography.

The FBI claims that, during recent interrogation, Volino revealed that he had struggled with an addiction to child porn, but that he would never take any abusive action against youths.

While Volino does not stand accused of abuse, his arrest comes against the backdrop of scandal within the Catholic church, which is accused of ignoring pederast priests in the past, and simply moving them from one community to another instead of confronting the dangers they posed.

The Rochester Diocese contends that it has been aggressive in how it has confronted the issue, but Volino's arrest and the revelations about his counseling could spur fresh questions about its response.

The diocese would not comment beyond its prepared statement, which did not answer whether it had taken any steps at all in regards to St. Luke's warnings in 2002.

Volino's attorney, John Parrinello, said Monday that he knew of no restrictions the diocese had placed on Volino since 2002. He said the country suffers from "priest-phobia" because of the scandal within the Catholic church.

Parrinello also argued that Volino should await his next court date under house arrest.

Feldman said the decision that Volino stay at the monastery is simply a precaution, adding that if there were firm evidence Volino was a threat, he would have jailed him instead.

Parrinello said he and Volino agreed to turn over the St. Luke's report to authorities.

"I didn't find anything in the testing that came to a conclusion that he was a danger," Parrinello said of the report.

Parrinello said he thinks St. Luke's counselors recommended the restrictions out of excessive caution and not out of the evidence from their interviews with Volino.

"As you go through (the report), you have more questions because it's so vague," he said.

What's next?

The Rev. Michael Volino is scheduled to appear April 12 for a preliminary hearing on the criminal charges he faces, receiving and possessing child pornography.

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