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Bishop: 'This Will Not Happen Again' --
Murphy faces 600 angry parishioners

By Carol Eisenberg and Tom Demoretcky
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Close to 600 people jammed an evening meeting at St. Anne's Church in Garden City last night demanding answers about two priests who worked there in the 1990s who have had sex abuse allegations made against them.

Bishop William Murphy, who was installed in September to lead the diocese, addressed the group and promised that no priests who have been subject to credible sexual allegations would be allowed to work in parishes. "On my watch this will not happen again," he vowed, according to Joanne Novarro, a diocese spokeswoman.

Novarro said that Murphy told parishioners he feels their pain. He said he can't change what happened in the past but he had reviewed all personnel records and assured those attending, as he has said previously, that there is no priest in the Diocese of Rockville Centre active in ministry who has molested children.

The meeting was called by the pastor of St. Anne's, John Gilmartin, to answer questions that had arisen since media stories last week said two priests who had worked at the parish faced allegations of sex abuse. The two priests named were Brian McKeon and James C. Miller.

McKeon, who is in the process of resigning from the priesthood, told Newsday last week he had made a mistake more than a decade ago and said, "I was wrong and I admitted I was wrong." Miller, who is on leave from the diocese, has said that accusations against him were false.

At last night's meeting, which was closed to reporters, Murphy said the allegations did not involve children in the St. Anne's parish, according to people leaving the meeting. The allegation concerned children at other parishes, they said.

Coming out of the meeting, some people said they were glad to hear from the bishop but did not feel their questions had been answered.

"Everyone should go home and talk to their kids to find out if they had any problems with these priests," said Greg Cooper, a parishioner who attended the meeting. "My concern is for the children, and hopefully none of them was abused."

The mood of parishioners was largely angry and bewildered. People expressed emotions ranging from shock at the allegations to anger at the media and at the church.

"This was a starting-off point for healing and coming together," said Beth Fee. "There's a lot of sadness about Father Brian. People trusted him so much and he did a lot of good here for a lot of people. People are numb and shocked."

Fee said she was heartened by Murphy's pledge to deal openly and directly with abusive priests. "I think people know the future will be better. He's a very bright man in a very difficult situation."