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Five Priests Retiring with Abuse Accusations

By Carol Eisenberg
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Five of the 10 priests listed as retiring this year from the Diocese of Rockville Centre had their priestly faculties removed recently because of allegations of sexual misconduct.

The priests were listed in an article about new priest assignments, including retirements, in the Long Island Catholic, a weekly newspaper published by the Roman Catholic diocese.

The article did not mention misconduct charges, although the newspaper published a story earlier mentioning allegations against two of the men. The other five priests retiring had no charges against them, said Joanne Novarro, spokeswoman for the diocese.

"To my knowledge, five have had allegations made against them [of sexual misconduct involving minors] and have had their faculties removed," Novarro said. When a bishop removes a priest's faculties, he can no longer celebrate Mass, hear confession or represent himself in public as a priest.

Asked whether Bishop William Murphy also would seek to have the priests defrocked - a complex process that requires Vatican approval - Novarro said she did not know. Unless the men are defrocked, they will draw health and retirement benefits from the diocese.

"I'm not sure the bishop has made a decision on any of them, because the allegations are still under investigation in many cases," she said.

Murphy, who had voted earlier this month with the majority of the nation's bishops in favor of a binding policy requiring the removal of any priest who had abused a minor, had instituted such a policy in Rockville Centre several months earlier.

The national policy leaves it to each bishop to decide whether to pursue the canon-law process to defrock, or laicize the priest. Murphy has asked several priests to voluntarily apply for laicization, but he has not indicated how he will proceed in cases where the priest refuses. Those retiring priests who have allegations against them are:

The **Rev. Joseph C. McComiskey**, pastor of St. Edward the Confessor Church, Syosset, since 1990. McComisky could not be reached. Novarro said an allegation against him was made on the diocese's new sex abuse hotline and was referred to local prosecutors. She said she did not know details of the complaint.

The **Rev. Louis Newman**, who has worked in a San Diego diocese for the last decade after serving in several parishes on Long Island, the last one being SS. Cyril and Methodius in Deer Park in the mid- to late 1980s. No details of the complaint were available.

Msgr. Charles A. Ribaudo, formerly of St. Dominic's Church in Oyster Bay since 1987, who was removed as a result of allegations that he had abused Michael Hands more than 20 years ago when Hands was a high school student. Ribaudo denied the allegations in an April interview. Hands, who went on to become a priest, pleaded guilty in March to sodomy charges involving a teenage boy.

The **Rev. Robert Saccacio**, who had been pastor of St. Martin of Tours in Amityville since 1987, in connection with allegations he had abused a teenager in the 1960s. Saccacio, who retired May 1,

could not be reached.

The **Rev. Kenneth Nee**, who was pastor of Our Lady of Fatima in Manorhaven since 1980, in connection with allegations he had abused a teenager in the 1960s. Nee, who retired May 1, could not be reached.

One active diocesan priest reacted angrily to the diocese newspaper's mixing of names.

"I cannot believe that they have put good priests in the same list with abusers," said the priest, who asked not to be named. "It is incredibly disrespectful to them and hurtful to their parishes. I can't imagine what they were thinking to put out a list like this."

The editor of The Long Island Catholic referred questions to Novarro, who declined to comment.

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