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Church Protesters Demand Apology

By Rita Ciolli
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Demanding an apology from Msgr. John Alesandro for failing to help sexual abuse victims who complained to him about predatory priests, about 40 people protested outside St. Dominic's Church in Oyster Bay Wednesday night where the former Diocese of Rockville Centre top official is now pastor.

"As Christians, we are supposed to forgive and we would do that if he showed any kind of remorse," Pat Cuomo of Northport said. "An apology is in order to my brother and the other victims and he needs to own up to his responsibility in the scandal."

The group stayed outside the rectory for about 45-50 minutes, some holding posters reading, "Monsignor, it's time to confess," and "Monsignor Thou Shalt Not Lie."

Andrew Cuomo, who lives in Milwaukee and flew in Wednesday for the demonstration, said the late Rev. Robert D. Huneke began abusing him in 1972 when he was a 14-year-old who had been recommended to the priest for counseling. Huneke had been named in lawsuits accusing him and other priests with sexual abuse.

Cuomo, who attended Catholic schools from first grade through law school, didn't report the alleged molestation until the late 1980s when he was contacted by John Salvesson, a friend he knew from the parish.

Salvesson asked Cuomo to tell Alesandro that he, too, was a victim. Cuomo did, he said, tell Alesandro of his own years of abuse by Huneke.

"He was very impassive, almost clinical," Cuomo said, adding, "I never heard from him again." However, Cuomo said he is scheduled to meet with Alesandro Friday.

Alesandro, who became chancellor of the diocese in 1978 and later a key player in the handling of abuse claims, was unavailable for comment Wednesday night. He has previously denied any wrongdoing or negligence in the handling of cases.

"I feel our diocese did a pretty good job as we realized there was a problem. We helped anyone who complained or who made an accusation," he said in a May 2004 interview with Newsday.

Pat and his mother, Bernice, 82, have been demonstrating at the Oyster Bay parish -- often standing in silent protest in the pew when Alesandro delivers a homily -- since last spring, soon after Andrew first told them about the abuse.

Wednesday night, about 15 members of the Cuomo family were joined by Voice of the Faithful members and Cindy Kouril, who is seeking the Democratic nomination to run against Nassau District Attorney Denis Dillon.

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