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Accuser May Meet with Alleged Abuser Syracuse Diocese Officials Hope to Arrange Session

By Sean Kirst
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Ernest "Skip" Keller, who maintains he was sexually molested by a Roman Catholic priest from Liverpool in 1973, may get the meeting he wants with his alleged abuser.

Keller of Jacksonville, Fla., said he flew to Syracuse on Tuesday to meet with Bishop James Moynihan and the Rev. Michael Minehan, chancellor of the Diocese of Syracuse. Keller, who made the trip with his wife, said he paid for the trip, except for plane tickets that were a gift from a friend - another Florida man who has publicly said he was abused by a priest.

"I wanted to share my story with them, face to face," Keller said of Moynihan and Minehan. "And they told me they'd put me together with Father Proud."

Minehan confirmed Keller's account of the meeting. He said the diocese will try to arrange a meeting between Keller, 42, and the Rev. Albert Proud, who is receiving treatment at St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Md., which treats and counsels priests accused of sexual abuse.

The diocese has received two complaints of sexual abuse involving Proud, Minehan said. In keeping with diocesan policy, he declined to comment on whether the first allegation has been substantiated. And he said diocesan officials have yet to question Proud about the allegations made by Keller, a Syracuse native who spent his childhood in Liverpool.

"He'll have a chance to respond," Minehan said of Proud.

But Minehan said the diocese is talking to counselors at St. Luke about making the meeting happen between Keller and Proud.

"We're trying to arrange it," Minehan said. "I would think that if it's going to help a victim work through the issues, that (meeting) would be Father Proud's obligation."

As for Keller, Minehan said, "It was good for us to hear the story of someone who's been hurt, someone who's got a remarkable story of putting his life together, with the grace of God."

Proud was pastor at Annunciation Church near Clinton, Oneida County, until he took a sabbatical in April. The diocese later confirmed he is being treated at St. Luke.

Keller claims he was 14 years old when Proud - then serving at Christ the King Church in Liverpool - drove him to a trailer at Selkirk Beach and molested him in 1973. Keller said the shame and humiliation of the incident helped propel him into a life of chaos. He was arrested several times and had four marriages collapse, he said, before he "found Christ" and his life turned around.

Keller, who now offers prison ministry, said he wants to meet with Proud for two reasons.

"I want to tell him, as calmly as I can, about my life," Keller said. "I want him to know. I want to tell him about the distrust and anger and hate, the whole downward spiral of drugs and alcohol. I was in and out of jail. I was in and out of the nuthouse. I want the chance to forgive him to his face."

"I want him to know about that, and I also want to ask his forgiveness for my anger, because I fantasized for years about killing this guy."

Keller said he asked the diocese for \$20,000 in damages, money that Keller promises to use for prison ministry. Minehan declined to speak about any specific amount, but he said the diocese is "always willing to offer counseling, or to reimburse people for counseling expenses they've (incurred) in the past."

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