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Diocese Clears Priest of Abuse

The Rev. James Quinn is returned to duties. Officials act to remove the Rev. Thomas Keating.

By Renee K. Gadoua
Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY)
December 16, 2004

The Syracuse Diocese has cleared a prominent priest of accusations he sexually abused a boy 40 years ago. Officials also removed from ministry another priest accused of sexual abuse while serving at St. Mary Church in Cortland in the 1980s.

The Rev. James F. Quinn, 72, who recruited candidates for the priesthood as director of the Syracuse Diocese's Office of Vocation Promotion, will return to priestly duties. Bishop James Moynihan has not announced his assignment.

The Rev. Thomas Keating, 65, can no longer celebrate Mass, administer the sacraments or present himself as a priest. His case will be sent to the Vatican, which could dismiss him from the priesthood.

Wednesday's announcement brings to 20 the number of priests the Syracuse Diocese has removed from ministry in the last two years because of sexual abuse allegations. Of those removed, the cases of 17 priests have been sent to the Vatican, which could request church trials.

The Vatican has not approved any requests that the local priests be laicized, or removed from the priesthood, said Danielle Cummings, diocesan spokeswoman.

Diocesan investigations have cleared eight priests, including Quinn. The diocese continues to investigate two other priests, Cummings said.

Since the scandal began in January 2002, diocesan officials have refused to reveal the names of priests accused of sexually abusing minors. Nor will they name priests cleared or priests against whom sufficient evidence is found to require dismissal.

According to a national report released in February, 4,392 priests in the United States were accused of molesting more than 10,000 minors from 1950 to 2002.

Although local officials refuse to release names, they previously have confirmed permanently removing from ministry Monsignors Francis J. Furfaro, H. Charles Sewall and John M. Zeder, and the Revs. James Hayes, Donald Hebert, William Lorenz, Chester Misercola and Albert Proud.

Cummings said the bishop made public information about Quinn and Keating because of the notoriety of the cases.

Since being accused in May 2003, Quinn has maintained his innocence. At the time, he took a voluntary leave from his job recruiting priests for the diocese.

He was not available for comment Wednesday, but in a statement the diocese provided, Quinn said he is "pleased and satisfied" with the investigation's outcome.

"The past 19 months have been most difficult for me, my family and friends," he said. "I am most grateful for their unconditional love, trust and support. I now look forward to moving on and living out my priestly ministry."

A \$150 million lawsuit accused Quinn of exploiting and sexually abusing a student at Catholic schools

in Utica from 1963 to 1970. The suit also accused local church leaders of knowing of the abuse and failing to stop it.

Church officials say they have received no other allegations of sexual misconduct against Quinn.

In November 2003, state Supreme Court Justice Norman Siegel dismissed the lawsuit because the statute of limitations had run out. Frank Policelli, of Utica, who is representing the Oneida County man who said Quinn abused him, is appealing that ruling.

"This is completely meaningless," Policelli said of the diocesan announcement.

"He's still guilty," he said. "Anybody that takes the diocese's word when they are defendants joined at the hip are fools and they mock the system of justice."

Keating was accused of abusing 12-, 13- and 14-year-old sisters from 1982 to 1993. The sisters, now in their 30s, said Keating groped, molested and abused them from 1982 to 1985 while they worked at the rectory of Cortland's St. Mary Church, where he was pastor.

A lawsuit filed in January in Onondaga County Court says the diocese and its bishops were negligent in not removing Keating from ministry. The lawsuit accuses the diocese of violating the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act by conspiring to conceal criminal sexual conduct by a priest.

In a separate lawsuit, Keating was accused of similar behavior with a teenage victim identified in court papers as Jane Doe. The woman, who lives in Cortland, said Keating sexually abused her after she told him Monsignor Zeder had raped her. The diocese removed Zeder from ministry in July 2002.

Keating was pastor at Most Holy Rosary in Binghamton from 1993 until he was asked to take a leave of absence in February while the investigation was pending.

At the time, Keating denied the allegations, and he continues to maintain his innocence, said his lawyer, Barry Abbott, of White Plains. Keating was unavailable for comment.

Abbott said the diocese did not treat his client fairly.

"Father Keating is deeply saddened by the bishop's actions and is disappointed in the bishop's refusal to hear from witnesses on his behalf, address facts uncovered by his investigation, and consider the motives of his accusers," Abbott said in a prepared statement.

Cummings confirmed that the diocese learned of allegations against Keating through the lawsuits. She would not say if officials had received other allegations, but said the diocese spoke with people who provided information to support their decision.

John Aretakis, who has offices in Albany and New York City, represents the Hansons and the woman identified as Jane Doe. In a prepared statement he praised his clients' courage and criticized the national and local church for its response to the scandal.

"Now that the church has admitted its wrongs, it is time to step up to the plate and compensate its victims who have suffered and experienced shattered childhoods," Aretakis said.

He said his clients feel some satisfaction at no longer being branded liars, but he questions why the investigation took so long. Aretakis also provided a statement in which the Hansons said Keating's removal provides comfort.

"This is just one more step in our journey to see true reform within the church and how it deals with abuse by clergy and how it treats their victims," the sisters said. "We remain undeterred in our goal to make sure what happened to us does not happen to others."

The Rev. Thomas F. Keating

Born: Nov. 1, 1939

Ordained: 1966

Appointments: Our Lady of Angels, Endwell; St. Mary Church, Cortland; Seton Catholic High School, Endicott; St. James Church, Johnson City; St. Catherine Church, Binghamton; Most Holy Rosary Church, Maine, Broome County

The Rev. James F. Quinn

Born: Sept. 21, 1932

Ordained: May 24, 1958

Appointments: St. John the Baptist, Syracuse; St. Patrick Church, Syracuse; St. Agnes Church, Utica; St. Paul Church, Rome; St. Theresa Church, Munnsville; St. Paul Church, Whitesboro; St. James Church, Syracuse; director of Vocation Promotion

Diocese passes audit

The Syracuse Diocese has been notified a second audit found it in full compliance with policies for handling the clergy abuse crisis. Representatives from the Boston-based Gavin Group visited the diocese in October.

In January, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a report that said the vast majority of dioceses, including Syracuse and Rochester, were in compliance with policies the U.S. bishops agreed to in June 2002.

Syracuse Bishop James Moynihan said the diocese will participate in a third audit next year.

Update on cases

In January, the Syracuse Diocese released a report that said 96 people have accused 49 priests of sexual abuse since 1950. Thirteen priests were being investigated at the time.

Wednesday, diocesan officials confirmed that the 49 priests accused of sexual abuse include:

20 priests removed from permanent ministry because of credible allegations.

8 priests cleared of allegations.

14 priests who are deceased.

2 priests who were laicized before allegations were reported.

2 priests being investigated.

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