

Priest with AIDS must leave parish

CINCINNATI (CNS) — A Cincinnati priest with AIDS said he has been asked to leave the parish where he has been living since revealing his illness.

The priest, Father Robert Apking, has been living at St. Christopher Parish in Vandalia, Ohio, since resigning as pastor of Dayton's Corpus Christi Parish in 1988.

In an interview with the *Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati archdiocesan newspaper, Father Apking characterized sentiment surfacing against him at St. Christopher's by saying, "They took me in as a dying priest and 'Damn it, he isn't dead.'"

He told the *Telegraph* that Cincinnati Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk has been supportive, telling him "No matter what happens I'll support you ... I haven't fired you."

Father Robert Monnin, St. Christopher's pastor, told parishioners May 12 that he had asked the priest to take another assignment. It was Father Monnin who had invited Father Apking to his rectory when he resigned the Dayton pastorate.

Father Monnin said May 16 that he had no comment.

Father Apking, 50, received national and local media attention when it was announced he would take part in a May 12 workshop for clergy and religious ministering to people with AIDS. The workshop took place at the Sisters of Charity motherhouse near Dayton.

Ray George, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, said the archdiocesan priest personnel director was working with Father Apking to find a place for him to live. He was permitted to stay in Vandalia until June 1.

In addition to celebrating Mass at St. Christopher's, Father Apking has a private psychotherapy practice in Vandalia. He completed a master's degree in mental-health counseling after recovering from pneumonia, which led to his resignation as pastor.

Although officially retired, he is a priest

of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati "in good standing with a special assignment" in counseling, according to George.

In 1988, when he announced he had AIDS, he was told he had only six months to live. He and Archbishop Pilarczyk together decided how to tell parishioners and informed them in letters. At the time parishioners talked about their concerns with a panel that included the archbishop and a Dayton physician.

Archbishop Pilarczyk said then that in making the news public "we have treated parishioners like adult human beings," and he called for "understanding, prayerful support and love" for Father Apking.

During the May 12 workshop, Father Apking said "the most painful thing" he felt was "the constant homophobia."

"It's OK to be gay but just don't be near me" is how he's been treated, he said, citing newspaper clippings he had received in the mail with "Shame, shame, shame," scrawled across them.

Father Apking also said letters to the archbishop asked, "How did he get this?"

"I'm afraid because of publicity I've been tagged as a gay activist," he said.

He told the *Telegraph* many parishioners at Corpus Christi and St. Christopher have been supportive, offering prayers and keeping in touch. He also has found sup-

port and a renewed self-image through a national group, Communication Ministry, a network for lesbian and homosexual religious.

His priestly duties have shifted, he said, "from being parish priest to being a counselor and therapist, a wounded healer."

Although misunderstanding continues to surround AIDS and there is no known cure, the priest said he was not endangering anyone but himself by continuing in his priestly vocation.

"I'm not a threat to anybody, physically or mentally," he said. "Everybody else is a threat to me. I'm the one with no immune system."

Father Apking said a day doesn't go by "when I'm not constantly aware of my vulnerability and my humanity," but that by continuing his ministry "I hope to be an inspiration for others. The Christian message is that we live with a risen Christ."

He added, "I function as a priest in these ways: The Lord wants me to be a priest; my archbishop wants me to continue the Lord's call, and I enjoy it. I like what I do."

Contributing to this story was Marianne Cianciolo and Rosi Mackey in Cincinnati.



AP/Wide World Photos
During his mid-May visit to Mexico, a weary Pope John Paul II greets crowds May 12 in Villahermosa, the see-city of Rochester's Sister Diocese of Tabasco.

School delays plan to dispense condoms

SAN FRANCISCO (CNS) — In response to threats of a lawsuit from concerned parents, a California public high school has delayed implementing a controversial plan to dispense condoms to its students without asking for parental consent.

The program had drawn fire from, among others, Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, who said that instituting such a plan at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, Calif., "implies the acceptance of casual sex as normal."

School officials announced May 15 that

on the "advice of our legal counsel we've delayed implementation of the program pending legal review." The plan would have marked the first time a California school openly gave out condoms without parents' consent.

The decision came after a lawyer threatened not only to file suit against the school district on behalf of the parents of a female student, but also to ask a judge for an injunction to halt any condom distribution.

The lawyer, Judith Tomsic, told reporters she had been contacted by many parents voicing concern that the school could be contributing to statutory rape and child abuse when "the law presumes" that girls under age 18 "cannot consent to sexual intercourse."

The program called for a school nurse to provide condoms free of charge to any interested student, after a mandatory orientation session including instruction on proper use of condoms, and pamphlets on abstinence, safe sex, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. The names of participating students were to be kept confidential.

Archbishop Quinn said "this decision attacks the fundamental bond of parent and child," by undermining the parent's authority and also "contributes to parental irresponsibility by removing from the parents any need to have concern about the deeper human, moral and spiritual needs of their children."

After the delay was announced, school principal Barbara Galyen, who has defended the decision to institute the condom program, said she still thought it was a good idea.

The program was initiated by student body president Dave Harris, who said the idea developed after a history teacher at the school died of AIDS. Before his death, the teacher, Chuck Smith, warned students in one of his classes to use condoms.



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Bishop's Office

My dear people:

A year ago when I wrote asking your support of the annual Catholic Communications Collection, I told you that our diocese would affiliate with the U.S. Catholic Bishops' satellite delivery system, Catholic Telecommunications Network of America (CTNA) this year. Your generosity enabled us to accomplish that goal.

In August we began providing teleconferences to professional and volunteer staff in our diocesan offices and parishes on such subjects as liturgy, pastoral care of the bereaved, ecumenism, spirituality, youth, ministry to the Hispanic community, education, and parish lay leadership. In addition to those attending these live teleconferences, others have benefited by viewing the videotapes we produce from each of the presentations.

I want to thank you for your past generosity to the Catholic Communications Collection, which has made this ministry possible nationally and in our own diocese. Fifty cents of each dollar you give to the Catholic Communications Collection stays in our diocese to support local communication efforts. The remainder helps create such national programs as 1989's "China at the Crossroads," aired by 127 ABC affiliates; PBS's "On Television: Teach the Children Well;" network television specials "A Passion for Faith" and "Circle of the Spirit;" and the motion picture, "Romero," starring Raul Julia, depicting the last three years of the life of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador.

This year's collection will be taken up in your parish on the weekend of June 9 and 10. Your generosity will be greatly appreciated.

With every good wish, I remain
Your Brother in Christ

Matthew H. Clark
+ Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

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