

# Former choir director faces sex-abuse charges

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

WATKINS GLEN — Charges of alleged sexual abuse are pending against a Horseheads man who formerly served as director of a Christian youth choir and as music director at St. Mary's of the Lake Parish, 901 N. Decatur St.

On Monday, Jan. 20, Leo McDermott II pleaded not guilty to charges of endangering the welfare of a child and third-degree sexual abuse. Arraignment for McDermott — who directed the Praise and Power Youth Choir — took place before Town of Barton Justice Clarence Van Horn.

During the arraignment, Van Horn read a supporting deposition from a 16-year-old member of Praise and Power. According to Van Horn, the deposition charged that McDermott sexually abused the youth in McDermott's van during a return trip from the Elmira area, repeatedly attempted to persuade the teenager to have sex with him, and grabbed the youth's buttocks when they arrived at the boy's Waverly home.

The deposition also reported another incident in which McDermott allegedly showed the teenager a photograph of a 13-year-old boy with whom McDermott allegedly said he had an affair. The choir member's deposition claimed that McDermott urged the boy to have a similar affair with him.

Although the alleged sexual abuse took place in the Tioga County village of Waverly, the 16-year-old made his statement Jan. 10 to Schuyler County Sheriff's deputies in Watkins Glen, where Praise and Power is based, according to Sheriff Michael J. Maloney. Maloney said he turned the investigation over to Waverly police after the boy made his statement.

McDermott's attorney, James A. Baker, said his client had been released without bail on the condition that he appear at all future court dates. Baker also said that no trial date has been set.

Endangering the welfare of a child is a Class A misdemeanor, and conviction carries a maximum penalty of one year in jail or three years probation. Third-degree sexual abuse is a Class B misdemeanor, and conviction on that charge could mean a maximum of three months in jail or one year of probation.

McDermott has garnered attention in the surrounding communities not only because of the current charges, but because he previously served almost eight months in an Ohio prison after being convicted of corrupting a minor in 1989.

The Ohio conviction stemmed from charges that McDermott conducted a four-year relationship with a male music student while teaching in the Lorain, Ohio, school system.

In addition to the prison term, the conviction also cost McDermott his certificate to teach music.

McDermott was hired to direct the adult choir at St. Mary's of the Lake Church in September of 1990, less than three months after leaving the Ohio prison.

Speaking on behalf of the parish, Father George Norton, diocesan public information officer, said St. Mary's pastor, Father David L. Bonin, asked McDermott to direct the choir after hearing McDermott perform during an August, 1990, parish celebration.

Father Norton said the Watkins Glen pastor did check the references McDermott furnished him. According to a secretary at the parish, Father Bonin currently is in Florida on vacation and cannot be reached for comment.

In early 1991, McDermott started the Christian-rock youth choir at the

Southern Tier parish. It quickly gained attention throughout the diocese for its efforts to use contemporary styles of Christian music in liturgical settings.

The youth choir earned an invitation to the Bishop's Day with Youth on April 14, 1991, at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. An annual gathering of young diocesan Catholics with Bishop Matthew H. Clark, the day culminated with the group's performance at Mass.

The group later adopted the name Praise and Power Choir and drew its members from various Christian denominations all over Tioga County, and from Elmira and Pennsylvania as well, according to Maloney.

Father Norton said McDermott's position at St. Mary's was terminated in November, 1991, after McDermott announced plans to be ordained a "full Gospel, non-denominational, charismatic minister."

Shortly thereafter, Maloney said, an anonymous source provided the sheriff with information about McDermott's prior conviction. Maloney proceeded to investigate McDermott's

case in Ohio, concluding that Praise and Power's board of directors should be informed of McDermott's past.

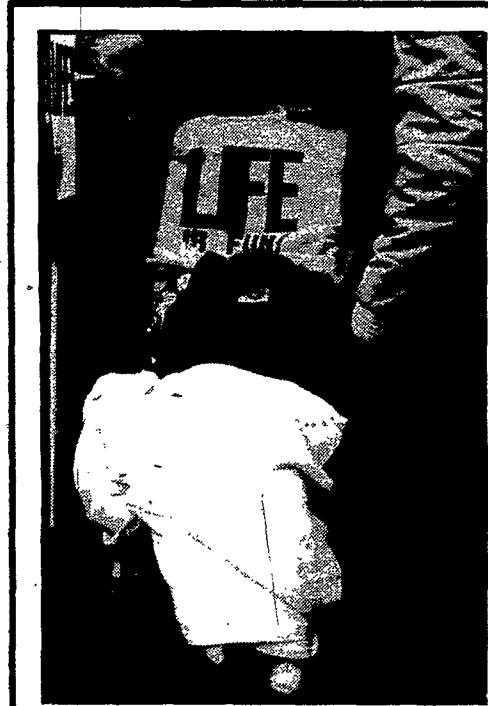
"If he was director of an adult choir, they probably would have never heard from me," the county sheriff said.

Maloney said "too many similarities" existed between McDermott's employment as a music teacher in Ohio and his employment in Schuyler County to dismiss the possibility of him repeating his actions.

In December, Maloney told the board of directors of Praise and Power about McDermott's prior conviction in Ohio. At a Jan. 12 meeting, parents and choir members learned that McDermott had resigned his position as director.

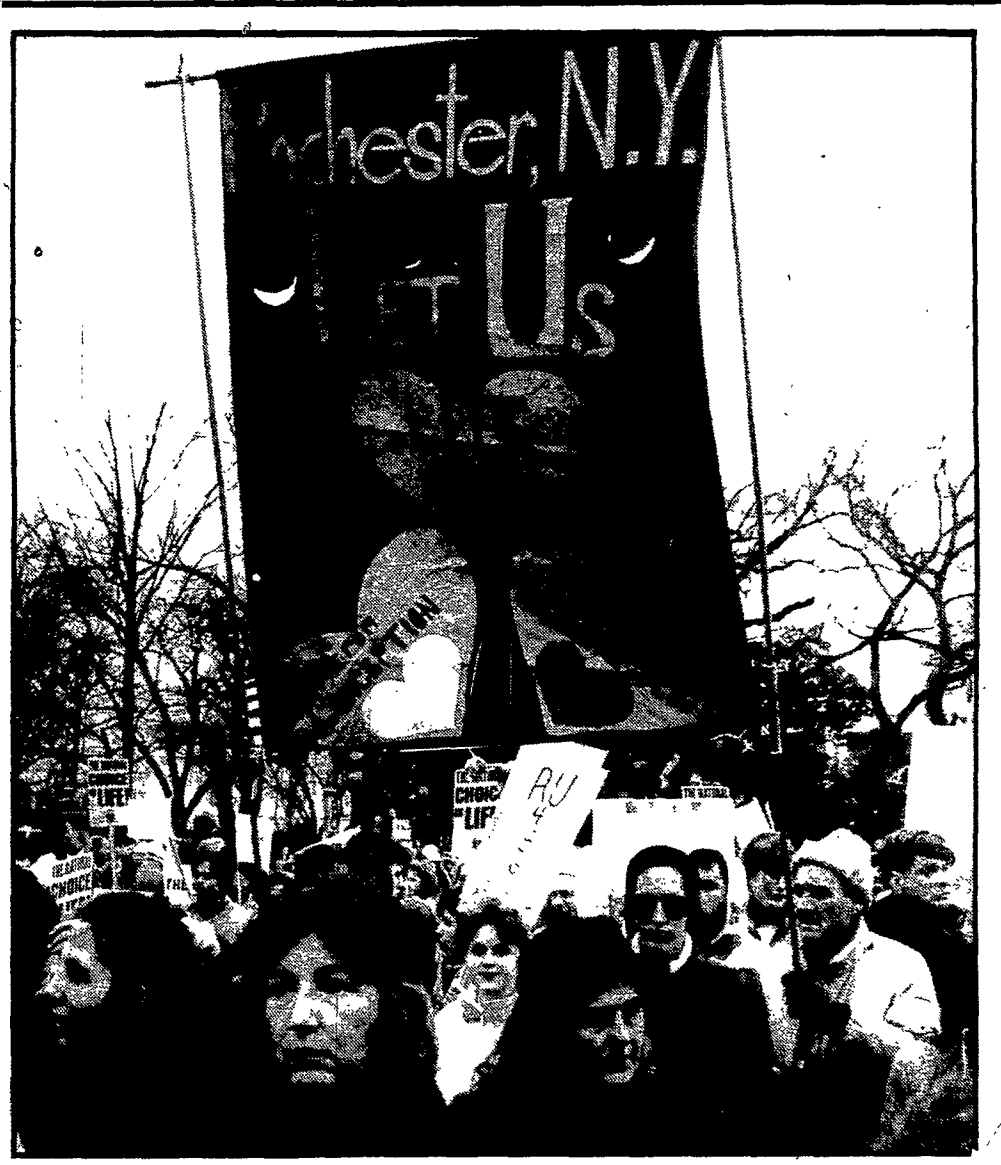
James Miranda, a spokesman for Praise and Power, said group members and their parents will meet on Monday, Feb. 3, to discuss whether the choir should continue.

Parents of the choir members have also met with psychologists to discuss how to best handle members' reactions to the allegations about McDermott, Miranda noted.



**MARCHING FOR LIFE** — Several hundred people from the Diocese of Rochester traveled to Washington, D.C., Jan. 22 to take part in the 19th Annual March for Life. Catholic parishes and other groups from Rochester, Waterloo, Elmira and Apalachin sent bus loads of marchers on the trip. For more on the March for Life, see page 5.

Photos by Joseph W. DiJames



# Frey budget director appointed diocesan fiscal chief

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — James M. Rinefierd, who served in the management and budget office under former Monroe County Executive Thomas Frey, has been hired as the diocese's chief financial officer.

Rinefierd, who served as director of the Office of Management and Budget for the former Monroe County Executive's office from 1988-91, assumed his new position effective Jan. 27.

He replaces Father Peter T. Bayer, who stepped down as chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester and director of diocesan Financial Services on Dec. 31, 1991.

Among his duties as chief fiscal offi-

cer, Rinefierd will manage diocesan financial activities; maintain oversight of parish financial affairs; develop and oversee all diocesan budgets; and oversee diocesan investments. He will serve as staff to the finance and investment committees of the Bishop's Stewardship Council.

Rinefierd was chosen from among 80 candidates because of his experience in finance as well as his involvement in church activities, noted Father John M. Mulligan, vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Office.

A 1981 graduate of the University of Rochester's William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration with a master's degree in finance and applied economics, Rinefierd worked for the University's Laboratory

for Laser Energetics from 1977-82 and Bausch & Lomb Corporation from 1982-88 before joining county government.

In addition, he was active with the U of R's Newman Community before joining the parish community at Church of the Transfiguration in Fairport.

A native of Liverpool, N.Y., Rinefierd noted that one of the reasons he remained in Rochester after college and ultimately pursued the diocesan position was that he and his wife, Karen, were impressed with the church in Rochester.

"When the job was announced, it was a good match of professional interest and of personal interest in the Diocese of Rochester," he said. "I rea-

lly care about the diocese and the direction it's moving in," he added, citing the synod and the restructuring of the pastoral office.

Rinefierd acknowledged that the diocese must deal with difficulties due to the troubled economy. "The diocese is facing the challenge of limited resources and growing demands," he said.

Nevertheless, Rinefierd said his experience with county government and its attempts to meet many demands with limited resources will help prepare him for his new post.

Rinefierd added that "the opportunity to be of service in this capacity is something I never would have dreamed possible."