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Diocese probes alleged sexual abuse by priest

By Jennifer Ficaglia
Assistant Editor

The Diocese of Rochester is investigating the alleged sexual abuse of a minor by one of its priests.

The investigation gained public attention March 14 after Bishop Matthew H. Clark met with the editorial board of the *Democrat and Chronicle*. The Rochester daily newspaper had invited Bishop Clark to discuss how the diocese handles allegations of sexual abuse by priests and whether dioceses should be forced to report such allegations to law enforcement. When asked if the Diocese of Rochester had received any recent reports alleging that priests had committed sexual abuse,

the bishop answered honestly that it had received one such report, according to Michael Tedesco, diocesan director of communications.

The diocese learned of the accusation through a call fielded by one of its designated intake representatives, Tedesco said. In 1993, the diocese appointed two people — Barbara Pedeville, then-coordinator of parish personnel services and currently director of management and staff relations for the diocesan Parish Human Resources Services, and Father Robert Ring, then-director of the diocesan Department of Priest Personnel and currently pastor of the Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community in the Finger Lakes — to handle all reports alleging sex-

ual abuses by priests.

The abuse in the case currently under investigation is alleged to have taken place more than 10 years ago.

Tedesco said he could not comment on details of the investigation. He did say the next step is for either Pedeville or Father Ring to interview both the accuser and the alleged perpetrator. The bishop's advisory board — which comprises mental health professionals, attorneys and representatives of the diocese's human resources department — also will be involved in the process.

If the evidence against the priest is deemed credible, he will be removed from his assignment and placed on administrative leave, Tedesco said.

"We don't return priests to ministry if there are very credible allegations made against them," he said. "Our first concern is to effect healing to the victims and to ensure the safety of the rest of the community."

When allegations of abuse are substantiated, the diocese informs the victim of the option to report the situation to law-enforcement officials. If the victim chooses to do so, "we cooperate to the fullest extent," Tedesco said.

A bill is being crafted in New York that would require dioceses to report all abuse allegations to law enforcement. Tedesco said this legislation concerns Bishop Clark because he fears it would discour-

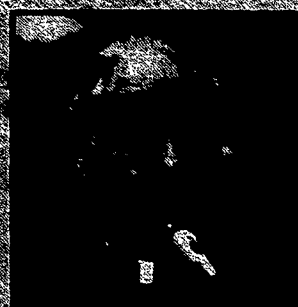
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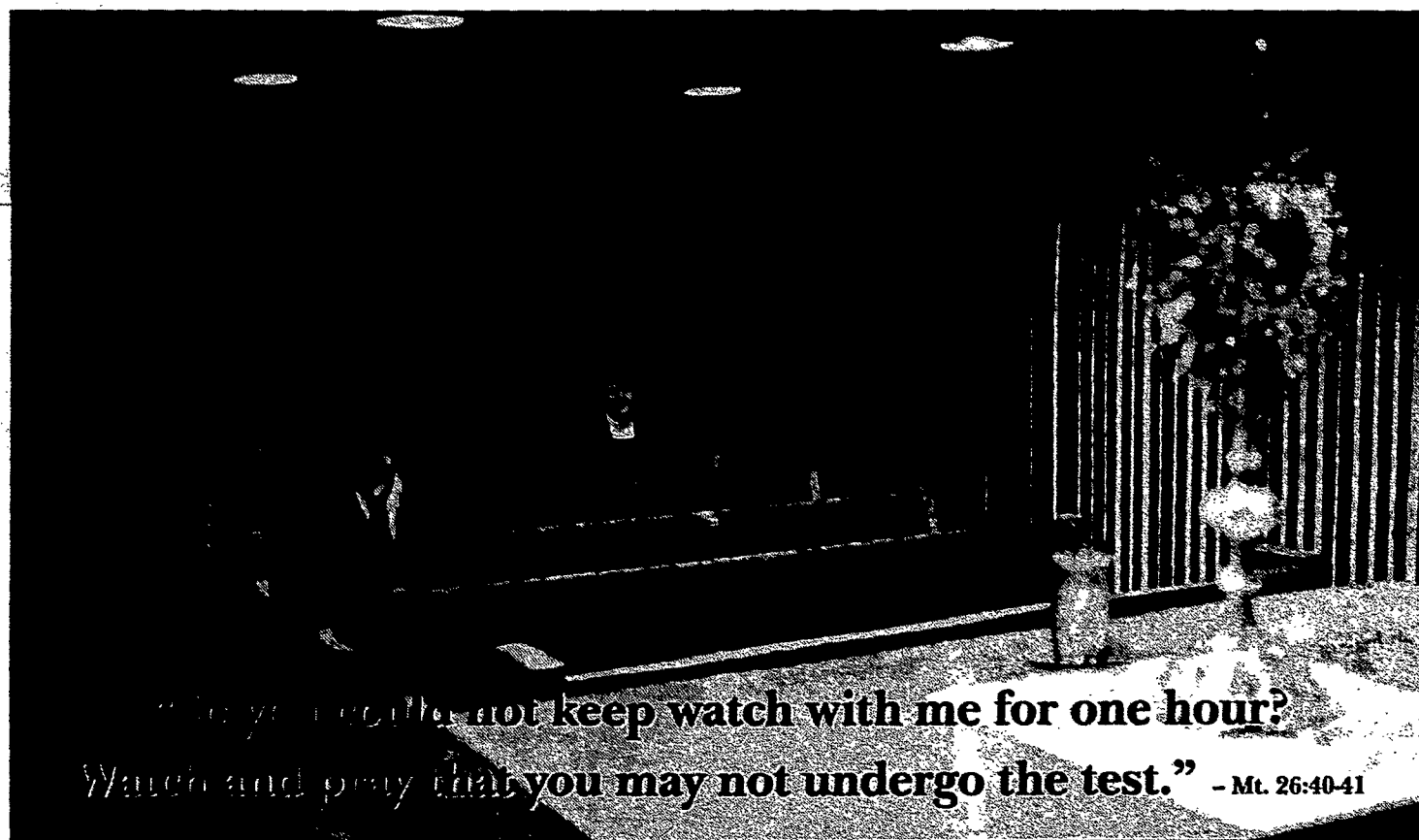


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Quiet time with Christ



"Can you really not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test." — Mt. 26:40-41

Jeanne Surber (left) of St. Michael's Parish, Newark, and Judy Shanahan of St. John of Rochester Parish, Perinton, pray before the Eucharist in a monstrance on the altar of St. John's Perpetual Adoration Chapel March 13.

On the evening of March 28, most parishes in the diocese will follow Holy Thursday services with eucharistic adoration, which recalls Jesus' fervent prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This annual tradition may be the only time most Catholics are involved in the practice of adoration. Yet several groups in the Diocese of Rochester keep this form of devotion going throughout the year.

Many parishes offer adoration on a weekly or monthly basis, often in conjunction with a nocturnal adoration group. In addition, five diocesan parishes are sites for perpetual adoration — a 24-hour, year-round commitment.

Adoration can take one of two forms: before a tabernacle, or before an exposed Eucharist placed in a monstrance or ciborium. Either way, the bond between the Eucharist

and its adorers is quite powerful, Judy Shanahan observed.

"You can just see that they're troubled. Perhaps they've lost a loved one or they have addictions. We really have an opportunity to pour out our hearts. We all come out of the chapel restored and refreshed," said Shanahan, who coordinates perpetual adoration at Perinton's St. John of Rochester parish.

"Once you become an adorers you can't live without it," added Angie Sgro, head coordinator of the perpetual adoration group at St. Casimir Church in Elmira.

"It brings stability in your life," said Dick McGill, president of the Elmira-area Nocturnal Adoration Society.

Nocturnal

Nocturnal adoration brings together wor-

shippers at regularly scheduled times, usually once per month for periods of one to three hours. This devotion has traditionally taken place late at night, but early-evening scheduling has become more common in recent years.

Prayer recitation for nocturnal adoration is taken from the Liturgy of the Hours. This devotion also includes hymns, intercessions and silent, private prayer.

"According to the ritual, there should be at least three people to split the prayers up — a right-side leader, a left-side leader and someone to respond," said Father Thomas Mull, pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Canandaigua.

Father Mull has served since 1988 as moderator of the Rochester Nocturnal Adoration Society. The group has nine parish

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STORY BY MIKE LATONA • PHOTOS BY JAMES STEIN