

Diocese may toughen sexual abuse policy

By Jennifer Ficaglia
Assistant Editor

As the diocese continued its investigation April 15 into two alleged abuse cases, it is considering removing from ministry priests who have in the past sexually abused minors of any age, even if the incidents were isolated and the priests in question never committed any other abuse.

Father Joseph Hart, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center, said that the current national scandal of sexual abuse by priests has prompted the diocese to discuss this measure.

"Given the present climate with victims and people generally in the pews feeling not safe, they've begun to ask those in authority to remove from ministry even those

about whom allegations were received more than 30 years ago," Father Hart said.

Father Hart spoke to the *Catholic Courier* on the same day Bishop Matthew H. Clark's advisory board was to discuss two alleged cases of past abuse by priests.

Father Hart said the board met April 15, and is asking for more information on both cases. Both incidents, Father Hart pointed out, are alleged to have occurred so many years ago that they are far beyond the statute of limitations and no longer prosecutable.

As the investigation continues, the diocese has a decision to make: How to strengthen its abuse policy while striking a balance between those for whom abuse is a pattern of incurable behavior and those who crossed a sexual boundary many years

ago, were treated at the time and successfully returned to ministry without further incident, Father Hart noted.

Case in point is Father Joseph Brodnick, a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland who has been a chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira since 1997.

On April 8 Cleveland Bishop Anthony M. Pilla asked Father Brodnick and nine other priests of his diocese to remove themselves from their ministries after the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office subpoenaed diocesan files related to abuse allegations against priests. Father Brodnick resigned from his post at St. Joseph's on April 9.

While a young priest working in the Cleveland Diocese during the mid-1970s, Father Brodnick was accused of having an

inappropriate relationship with a girl in her late teens, according to Michael Tedesco, spokesman and communications director for the Diocese of Rochester.

According to a press release from the Diocese of Cleveland, officials there were aware of the alleged incident and, according to Cleveland's policy and understanding of the case at the time, provided Father Brodnick with an evaluation and treatment. He was subsequently returned to ministry, and to the knowledge of the Cleveland Diocese, has successfully performed his ministry without incident.

Both the Diocese of Rochester and St. Joseph's Hospital knew of the alleged incident when Father Brodnick applied for the chaplaincy post. He underwent ex-

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Remembering Padre Pio



KNA/CNS

A pilgrim presses close to a statue of Padre Pio di Pietrelcina in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy. The Italian Capuchin priest will be canonized in June.

SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO, Italy (CNS) — Less than a century ago, San Giovanni Rotondo was a typical southern Italian village, cut off from the rest of the world in remote, rocky hills near the Adriatic Sea.

But in 1916 a young priest named Padre Pio was transferred to the Capuchin monastery on the village outskirts.

From these small beginnings has grown a worldwide spiritual movement. Padre Pio will be named a saint in June, and the village of San Giovanni Rotondo has been transformed into one of the most developed pilgrimage complexes in the world.

Even before his death in 1968, Padre Pio's reputation for holiness and extraordinary spiritual gifts — most remarkably, the stigmata — had spread all over the world, eventually drawing hundreds of thousands of people, including the future Pope John Paul II, to seek his advice and blessing every year.

Today the flow of devotees has surged to nearly 8 million people a year, making San Giovanni Rotondo the No. 1 pilgrimage destination in Europe, second worldwide only to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.

The town is also home to dozens of commercial and charitable activities carried out in Padre Pio's name, including a large state-of-the-art hospital, a television station, homes for the elderly and an olive-oil business.

To accommodate the spiritual needs of the ever-growing crush of pilgrims, the Capuchins have begun building one of Europe's largest and most architecturally ambitious churches, with seating for 8,000 people, a 6,000-pipe organ and 50 confessionals. It is scheduled to be completed in May 2003.

Father Elmer McNamara, retired pastor of St. Bridget and St. Joseph's churches in East and West Bloomfield, remembers when San Giovanni Rotondo was a small, rural community that happened to be home to a priest just gaining notice for his works.

Father McNamara heard about Padre Pio in 1934 while he was a student at Gregorian University. Wanting to meet him, Father McNamara convinced a fellow student to accompany him to San Giovanni Rotondo for Mass.

Padre Pio started Mass at 5:30 a.m., so the two priests stayed in San Giovanni Rotondo the night before to make sure they would be on hand for the liturgy. Father McNamara remembers that there were no hotels in San Giovanni Rotondo at the time, so he and the other priest found less-than-luxurious accommodations.

"We slept on the floor in a little place there," he said.

Father McNamara recalls the hour-and-a-half Mass, in which two little girls received their first Communion. Father McNamara was kneeling and saying prayers when something out of the ordinary happened.

"I remember distinctly at the offertory of the Mass, a gust of calla lily perfume," he said.

The woman next to him asked if he noticed the scent.

"That's the flowers at the altar," Father McNamara replied at the time, without looking up.

The woman then pointed out that there were no flowers on the altar.

"It emanated from him," Father McNamara said, referring to

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