

Layman fired after abuse allegations surface

By Jennifer Ficaglia
Assistant Editor

The Diocese of Rochester directed Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle Parish to dismiss its religious-education director April 25 after discovering he had allegedly abused a youth in Chicago more than a decade ago.

David Higbee had been the religious-education director at the church since 1992, and director of the Irenaeus Center, an adult-education center located on church property. He was dismissed from both positions.

Before coming to the Diocese of Rochester, Higbee was pastor of an independent evangelical church in Chicago. He

moved to Rochester in the early 1990s and converted to Catholicism before being hired by St. Thomas the Apostle, said Michael Tedesco, diocesan communications director.

Tedesco said diocesan officials were not aware of any allegations against Higbee at the time he was hired. He said the alleged victim had recently tracked Higbee's location in Rochester via the Internet, and someone who knew the alleged victim called the diocese to inform officials here of the allegations against Higbee.

"We subsequently spoke with the victim," Tedesco said.

It took diocesan officials a matter of days to interview the alleged victim as well as others in Chicago to determine that the

allegations against Higbee were credible. The allegations were so credible that the case did not have to be reviewed by Bishop Matthew H. Clark's advisory board, which usually investigates such accusations and determines their credibility, Tedesco said.

"We were quite comfortable that we already had (credible evidence) by talking to people in Chicago," Tedesco said. "It's an example of our (sex abuse) policy working."

Father Robert Bradler, pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle, said he and his parishioners are "saddened by the revelation" that Higbee had allegedly abused a youth while he was a Protestant minister in Chicago.

"He was part of the family," Father

Bradler said. "When one member hurts, we all feel it. We vow to continue to pray for him."

Tedesco said that neither St. Thomas the Apostle nor the diocese had received any allegations of inappropriate behavior by Higbee during his tenure at the parish.

He added that anyone wishing to report charges of abuse against Higbee or any other diocesan employee is encouraged to call one of the diocese's two designated intake representatives — Barbara Pedeville, coordinator of parish personnel services, and Father Robert Ring, pastor of Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community in the Finger Lakes region. Pedeville may be reached at 585/328-3210 or 800/388-7177, and Father Ring may be reached at 315/536-7459.

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Two decades of deacon service

Ron Terra of Gates wasn't even going to church a few months ago. Now, he wouldn't miss Sunday Mass for anything.

"I drive half an hour to church every Sunday, and if it was twice as far, I'd do it," he said.

He attends Mass at St. John of Rochester Parish in Fairport where Deacon Daniel Kinsky serves. The deacon works with Terra at a computer-hardware resale firm, and Terra credited Deacon Kinsky for inspiring him to return to the Catholic Church after a 12-year absence.

Terra said he has suffered through some traumatic events in his life recently, including family deaths, and has found peace through his renewed faith. He said Deacon Kinsky's low-key approach to talking about Catholicism made him feel free to share his questions with him.

"Dan will only discuss about (Catholicism) if you bring it up," Terra said. "He doesn't impose his belief on other people. I would feel free to refer anybody who has any kind of problems to him."

In addition to such informal counseling, Deacon Kinsky noted that he's baptized co-workers' children and witnessed their marriages. He wears a ring with a symbolic cross and fish to represent his ordained state, and said some customers and co-workers have begun to learn about Catholicism simply by asking what the ring represents.

"I think that what gives the diaconate credibility is that we can operate in that marketplace environment ... and that you're among the people and work in that environment like everyone else," he said.

Restoration

Deacon Kinsky was ordained 20 years ago among the first class of permanent deacons in the Diocese of Rochester. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the permanent diaconate was founded to provide support for widows who were being neglected. For various reasons, however, the diaconate eventually disappeared as a permanent state of life after the church's first few hundred years, and continued only as a transitional state leading to priestly ordination.

The permanent diaconate was restored following the Second Vatican Council. Permanent deacons may work in paid positions in the church, but most work in the secular



Bishop Clark greets members of this year's deacon class.

world, volunteering their time in both parish ministries and outreach programs. Currently, almost 13,000 serve the U.S. church, and more than 100 are working in the Rochester diocese.

Permanent deacons, most often married men, perform such duties as preaching, teaching and baptizing; witnessing marriages; presiding at funerals and weddings; conducting retreats and counseling sessions; and doing such acts of charity and justice as working with migrant farmworkers, inmates, the sick and those with developmental disabilities. With the decrease in the numbers of priests in recent years, more and more deacons have taken on such roles as parish administrators. Three deacons serve in that capacity in this diocese alone.

The late Bishop Joseph L. Hogan called for the establishment of a permanent diaconate in the diocese through his 1975 pastoral letter, *You Are Living Stones*. Three years later, after a diocesan commission had explored setting up a permanent diaconate program, the first group of candidates entered the now-defunct St. Bernard's Seminary for monthly classes.

Class of 1982 member Deacon Raymond Defendorf recalled that he and his wife, Patricia, would pack their kids into the family

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Deacon Patrick Shanley plays guitar during the convocation Mass.

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PHOTOS BY JAMES STEIN