

WORLD & NATION



Reuters/CNS

Independence celebration

East Timorese celebrate their independence in a soccer field near the capital of Dili May 20. Tens of thousands of joyous revelers in this mainly Catholic nation marked the new status. In the background, a man holds a scarf emblazoned with the national flag.

Priest accused of sexual abuse kills himself at treatment center

SILVER SPRING, Md. (CNS) — A Bridgeport, Conn., priest who had been accused of sexually molesting boys between 1976 and 1982 apparently committed suicide May 16 at a residential psychological treatment center.

Father Alfred Bietighofer, 64, was found hanging in his room at the St. Luke Institute just outside Washington, according to Prince George's County Police. Father Stephen Rossetti, a psychologist who runs the center, said a nurse found him.

Father Bietighofer was removed as assistant pastor of St. Andrew Parish in Bridgeport April 29, shortly after Bishop William E. Lori met with two men who accused the priest of abusing them. The men said they were abused when they were altar boys at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Bridgeport.

At the time he was removed, Father Bietighofer told a local newspaper he did not know anything about the allegations.

Since then, the Bridgeport attorney representing the two men has said about eight others have come forward with similar accusations against Father Bietighofer.

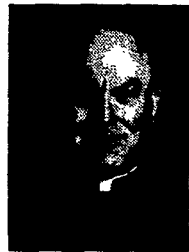
St. Luke Institute is a licensed private psychiatric hospital for Catholic clergy and religious men and women. It offers treatment for a wide range of problems including alcohol and substance abuse, sexual problems, depression, compulsive behaviors and personality disorders.

Father Bietighofer had been sent to the institute for evaluation after his dismissal from St. Andrew Parish.

In a statement, Bishop Lori said he was profoundly saddened by the priest's death and grateful to those who had reached out to Father Bietighofer. "In the same way, we must reach out in loving concern to any victims in our community, that they may achieve renewed peace of mind and heart," he said.

Just a few days earlier, a Baltimore priest was shot and seriously wounded by a man who had accused him of abuse. Father Maurice Blackwell was recovering in a Baltimore hospital.

Police said Dontee Stokes admitted shooting the priest May 13 because he refused to talk to him. In 1993 Father Blackwell was accused of improper touching of



Father Alfred Bietighofer

a minor, now identified as Stokes, and was removed from the parish for evaluation and counseling. The police investigation into the allegations was dropped because of insufficient evidence. The archdiocese's investigation led to no conclusions. Father Blackwell returned to his parish assignment in 1994.

When new charges of alleged child sexual abuse surfaced in 1998, Father Blackwell was put on a leave of absence.

Father Bietighofer's death came several weeks after an Ohio priest accused of sexual abuse committed suicide.

In April, Father Don Rooney, 48, shot himself to death after being accused of molesting a girl 22 years earlier. The associate pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Parma, a Cleveland suburb, was found dead in his car several days after he was accused.

In 1996 a Los Angeles priest who had been accused of sexually molesting children committed suicide in Washington. Father Theodore Llanos had been charged with 38 felony counts of sexual activity with minors in Los Angeles and Long Beach, though charges were dismissed because the statute of limitations had run out. In 1994 he was removed from ministry and was sent for treatment at St. Luke Institute.

After leaving the program, he remained in the Washington area, where he lived as a layman and worked in a bookstore. He was found dead in his bedroom — a plastic bag fastened over his head — in a Washington home Dec. 30, 1996. He had left a suicide note saying he was not guilty of the things he was accused of doing, but that life had become too painful.

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Lawsuit accuses cardinal of aiding abusive priest

LOS ANGELES (CNS) — In a new racketeering lawsuit filed May 20, four plaintiffs have accused Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of aiding and abetting their sexual abuse by Michael Baker, a former Los Angeles priest.

It is attorney Jeffrey Anderson's third lawsuit against Cardinal Mahony citing the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO.

In a brief statement Cardinal Mahony said, "The RICO claims brought today are baseless and irresponsible."

"I will not let these claims distract me from continuing to focus all of my energies on the most important issues at hand: reaching out to victims of clergy abuse and their families, assisting with their spiritual and emotional healing and expanding our programs to protect children," he said.

In a letter faxed to all his priests the previous week, Cardinal Mahony apologized for having returned Baker to ministry in the late 1980s after the man admitted he had sexually abused two minors.

Baker was quietly laicized in 2000 after

additional complaints against him surfaced. The complaints made it clear that, despite treatment and ongoing counseling, he continued to abuse minors after he had admitted sexual misconduct with two boys to the cardinal in 1986.

"As your archbishop, I assume full responsibility for allowing Baker to remain in any type of ministry during the 1990s," Cardinal Mahony said in his May 14 letter. "If I had known in those years what I discovered in early 2000, I would have dismissed him from all ministry and requested his dismissal from the priesthood in the late 1980s."

The *Los Angeles Times* reported May 16 that in 2000 the archdiocese received a complaint from two men living in Mexico saying that Baker had continued to molest them for 13 years after he admitted to the cardinal in 1986 that he had engaged in sexual misconduct with minors.

The archdiocese gave the brothers \$1.3 million, of which Baker paid about half, the *Times* reported.

The new lawsuit claims Baker abused at least a dozen youths. The four plaintiffs filed under "John Doe" pseudonyms.

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MISSION NEWS



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The rector of their seminary, writes: "Thanks to the generous support we receive from you, we are able to ensure that these young men will be able to complete their studies and be ordained."

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