

Priest removed pending review of alleged abuse

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has placed Father David Gramkee, pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, Seneca Falls, on administrative leave pending review of an allegation that he sexually abused a minor once in the late 1970s.

The diocese had investigated the allegation against Father Gramkee in the early 1990s. At that time, an advisory panel composed primarily of lay people had recommended to the bishop that the priest be allowed to continue in his ministry. Father Gramkee received counseling in 1993, the diocese said in a June 25 statement.

"(T)here had been no indication of re-

peat behavior since the 1970s, and he was deemed a low risk for repeat offense," the diocesan statement said.

However, the victim has recently come forward with new information about the case, and the diocese has discovered and clarified additional information, leading the diocese to review Father Gramkee's case, according to Michael J. Tedesco, diocesan director of communications. The bishop's recently appointed lay advisory panel — which includes attorneys, law enforcement officials and psychiatric professionals — will review the case.

While on leave, Father Gramkee is deprived of his faculties as a priest, prohibited from wearing clerical clothing and may not reside on parish or diocesan property.

Father Gramkee, 62, was ordained in 1966, and had served at parishes in Ithaca, Brighton, Auburn, Pittsford and Elmira before being assigned to Seneca Falls in 1992. A woman answering the telephone at St. Patrick's said the parish staff was declining at this time to comment on Father Gramkee's removal.

Father Gramkee is the seventh priest of the Rochester Diocese this year to have sanctions brought against him due to past sexual-abuse allegations. In May, three priests were asked to resign their pastorates due to such allegations, while three others had additional restrictions placed upon them. The diocese said it is still reviewing allegations of past sexual abuse against three additional priests.

The diocese said Father Gramkee was being placed on administrative leave in accordance with its sexual-abuse policy and with the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Dallas earlier this month. The charter enjoined church leaders to remove priests from church ministry if one credible allegation of sexual abuse was found against them.

"It is painful to have to go through this process once again, and I am especially sorry for any additional anguish this may have brought to the alleged victim," Bishop Clark said in the diocesan statement. "I remain steadfast in my belief that this is the only action we can possibly take."



Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 113 NO. 37 ■ THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2002 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

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Would you torture this man?

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story contains graphic descriptions of torture.

Sept. 11 was a day filled with fear, nervousness and news broadcasts, recalls Mercy Sister Janet Korn, social justice awareness coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester's Catholic Charities.

She remembers a plane flying into the capital city where she lived. She remembers hearing an explosion as a major governmental building was hit. And she remembers the president giving an address to the nation.

The difference between Sister Korn's memories of Sept. 11 and those of most other Americans is that she was recalling Sept. 11, 1973, when a U.S.-backed group of rightists overthrew the democratically elected leftist president of Chile, Salvador Allende. Sister Korn worked in Santiago, Chile's capital, from 1965 to 1981, and recalled the brutal dictatorship that took over, one that eventually killed about 3,000 people, and persecuted thousands more.

"There were many in our parishes who were picked up by the police and kept in secret houses where they were tortured," she said, noting that the torture bred both terror and anger among her fellow Catholics in Chile.

"People can't just stand to sit by and let their loved ones be tortured," she said, adding that the Catholic Church shielded many people from the government, and that she herself feared arrest for some of her work on behalf of the persecuted. Hence, Sister Korn is opposed to those who are suggesting that the United States legalize torture for use on suspects, particularly those who are in league with the terrorists who engineered that other Sept. 11 attack, the one that befell the United States last fall.

She added that she is praying for the success of a conference organized by torture survivors from such countries as Vietnam, Iraq, Nigeria and the Philippines to work against the rising chorus of voices in favor of legalized torture. The conference was slated to take place on June 25 and 26 at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. June 26 is the United Nations' annual Day in Support of Torture Victims and Survivors.

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Reuters/CNS

Military police escort a detainee from the war in Afghanistan to an interrogation room in camp X-Ray on the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Some commentators have argued that the United States should legalize the torture of such captives in order to obtain information that might prevent terrorist attacks.

STORY BY ROB CULLIVAN