

Allegations surface against 90-year-old priest

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Father Francis Vogt, a 90-year-old retired diocesan priest, has been accused of sexual misconduct that allegedly occurred more than 30 years ago.

According to a story that appeared in the Aug. 24 Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, several men claimed that Father Vogt repeatedly molested boys during his pastorate at Rochester's St. Bridget's Church. Bernard Benitez, 42, of Rochester, was the only alleged victim identified by name in the *Democrat and Chronicle* story.

Father Daniel Condon, diocesan chancellor, confirmed that credible complaints alleging sexual abuse were lodged against Father Vogt earlier this year as well as in

1993. He said the alleged victims have not filed a lawsuit.

In the *Democrat and Chronicle* article, Benitez said he is encouraging others to come forward if they believe they were abused by Father Vogt. Despite repeated attempts, the *Catholic Courier* could not reach Benitez for comment.

Jerry Vogt, a Hilton resident who is a nephew of Father Vogt, said the family is shocked at the allegations.

"We don't understand what these charges are all about," said Jerry Vogt, who is acting as a spokesperson for his uncle. He said Father Vogt moved earlier this year to the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary and is in ill health. Jerry Vogt added that family members plan to meet with diocesan officials to learn more specifics

about the allegations.

Father Vogt's ministry is limited to celebrating the sacraments at the SSJ infirmary, Father Condon said. No sanctions were placed on the priest following the 1993 complaint.

Father Condon said any investigation about the recent allegations would be hindered by the fact that Father Vogt has suffered significant memory loss and cannot clearly recall the alleged events. "There is certainly some concern about his ability to do that in a way that would be helpful to him," Father Condon said.

Father Condon declined to elaborate on why the diocese has deemed the allegations against Father Vogt credible, saying only that all complaints of sexual misconduct made to diocesan officials are taken

seriously.

Any such complaints may be reported to the diocese by contacting Barbara Pedeville at 585/328-3228, ext. 215, or Father Robert Ring at 315/536-7459.

Father Vogt was ordained a diocesan priest in 1938. For the first 15 years of his priesthood he assisted at several parishes and also spent four years as a chaplain with the U.S. Army Infantry. He was assigned to St. Bridget's as assistant pastor in 1953 and became pastor in 1961. He stayed there until 1977, when he became administrator of St. Anne in Palmyra. He was named St. Anne's pastor later that year and stayed in that role until his retirement in 1982. He continued living in Palmyra until earlier this year, when he moved to the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary.

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Sudanese refugees Awak Malith (right) and Andrew Machok reflect on their experiences at Rochester's Catholic Family Center Aug. 23.

Who gets into America?

It's ironic, black Sudanese refugees will tell you: Terrorists may be living legally in the United States on visas while they wait to strike the nation that allowed them entry. Yet refugees who love America can't come to the one country they would defend to the death — because those refugees are barred by policies designed to keep out terrorists.

Take Awak K. Malith, 24, who came to the United States this month as a refugee from Sudan, a war-torn nation south of Egypt. Since the 1980s, more than a million and a half Sudanese have died in a vicious civil war between the country's northern Arab Muslim extremist government and its black southern majority peoples, most of whom are animists and Christians, including

Catholics. The war has killed more than 1 million people, caused devastating famine, and has been used by Muslim extremists as a vehicle to enslave at least 200,000 non-Muslim Sudanese and to forcibly convert others.

Sudanese like Malith, who have lived in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, are pining to come to the United States, he and six other Sudanese refugees noted. The group gathered at Catholic Family Center in Rochester on Aug. 23 to tell their story, along with Matt Walker, senior case manager for CFC's refugee resettlement program.

Walker and the refugees noted that the flow of refugees from Sudan to the United States has slowed

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