

Group may form affiliate

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Voice of the Faithful, a Boston-based group formed in response to the clergy sex-abuse scandal, is seeking to form an affiliate in the Diocese of Rochester.

About 100 people attended an afternoon speech Feb. 9 by Janice Leary, a Voice of the Faithful founder, at Monroe Community College in Henrietta.

Leary said many young boys once interested in the priesthood have been lost to the church because they were abused by trusted clerics.

"We have lost some of the best, best Catholics to that clergy sexual abuse," she said.

Leary described Voice of the Faithful as a "centrist" organization that has three goals: to support those who have been sexually abused; to support "priests of integrity"; and to shape structural change within the church.

The group's third goal got a mixed response from audience members during the dialogue session of Leary's presentation. Some saw the goal as indicative of a wider agenda to reform the church in a liberal way. One woman questioned whether Leary's group was exploiting abuse victims to pursue its own goal of reforming the church.

"None of the victims of clergy sex abuse are working against the church — they don't want to have to do anything with the church," Leary said.

George Basil, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester, said the goal of structural change might raise a "red flag" with some Catholics. He suggested to Leary that Voice of the Faithful change its third goal to one of "accountability." In a follow-up interview, Basil added that while structural change may be needed, it is most important that the church's bishops be held accountable for what's happened during the crisis.

Voice of the Faithful member Father Bill Spilly, pastor of St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street in Rochester, said in an interview after Leary's presentation that he believes structural change is needed to prevent more abuse crises.

"I don't know how you get at accountability without some kind of structural change within the church," he said, noting, for example, that he would like to see lay people in governance positions in the church.

The issue of sex abuse itself was the subject of some debate during



Reuters/CNS

Robin Vachon, a victim of sexual abuse, hugs Father Thomas Doyle at a Voice of the Faithful conference in Boston July 20, 2002. The group is seeking to form an affiliate in Rochester.

the dialogue session. One woman told Leary that the sex-abuse problem was rooted in sin, not church structure, and another woman said that people needed to pray more to Mary in response to the crisis.

Following her speech, Leary said one of Voice of the Faithful's main desires is for "full disclosure" of the abuse crisis by the church. To Father Spilly, full disclosure means that each diocese should release the names of all priests against whom credible accusations have been made; the number of children abused; and the amount of money dioceses have had to spend to settle lawsuits.

In an interview, Michael Tedesco, spokesman for the Diocese of Rochester, said the diocese has been "transparent" about abuse cases among its priests, and plans "in the near future" to release information regarding the financial cost of the abuse crisis. He added that the diocese has indicated how many victims each abusive priest may have abused, but does not get more specific in order to protect the privacy of victims.

After Leary's speech, audience members interested in joining Voice of the Faithful were asked to provide their names and addresses on a sign-in sheet. Leary's presentation was sponsored by the Upstate New York/Rochester Chapter of Call to Action, a church reform advocacy group. Voice of the Faithful and Call

to Action are separate organizations.

Father Spilly, an organizer of Leary's visit, said interested audience members would be contacted within a month about a possible first meeting. He noted that local Voice of the Faithful organizers have not yet decided where to meet.

Voice of the Faithful, which has affiliates in several states, has found a mixed reception from diocesan officials around the country since its formation. Tedesco said Bishop Matthew H. Clark needs to learn more about the group before making any decisions about it.

"Bishop Clark recognizes the right of the Catholic faithful to join in associations which promote the common good and build up the body of Christ," Tedesco said. "He looks forward to learning more about Voice of the Faithful's aims and purposes, which he trusts are consonant with the mission of the church."

CORRECTION

The *Catholic Courier's* Feb. 6, 2003, article about Father Robert Hammond contained three factual errors. The lawsuit mentioned in that article actually was filed in New York State Supreme Court on December 12, 2002, on behalf of a plaintiff identified as John Doe.

TEACHER FIRED FOR PRO-CHOICE SUPPORT

WILMINGTON, Del. (CNS) — Ursuline Academy in the Diocese of Wilmington fired a middle-school religion teacher five days after she signed an advertisement supporting legal abortion.

Teacher Carey Cramer's name was one of more than 600 that appeared in a full-page advertisement in the *Wilmington News Journal* on Jan. 22, the 30th anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

Cramer-Cramer, a Catholic, has been a volunteer at Planned Parenthood since last April.

PRIESTS CONVICTED OF ABUSING MINORS

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Two priests in New York were convicted of sexual abuse of minors in early February. A third priest from the same diocese is under suspicion of abuse.

Father Michael E. Garcia, 36, a suspended priest of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., pleaded guilty in a Suffolk County court Feb. 4 to two counts of sodomy for sexually abusing a teenage boy between November 1999 and January 2001.

On Feb. 5 a Brooklyn jury found Father Francis X. Nelson, 39, guilty of molesting a teenage girl in 1992 during a home visit to her ailing grandmother.

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany removed Father James F. Kelly from ministry Feb. 3 after a lawsuit in Nebraska accused him of molesting a boy in 1978 in Boys Town, Neb. Bishop Hubbard suspended Father Kelly, 70, because he also had been the subject of a complaint of improper conduct with minors in the 1970s.

CARDINAL LAW PLANS TO MOVE TO GEORGIA

BOSTON (CNS) — Cardinal Bernard F. Law said he plans to move to a diocese in Georgia, Md., run by the Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Mich.

In a brief written statement released Feb. 7, he said, "I am very grateful to the Sisters of Mercy of Alma for their kind invitation to be their guest during this time of transition."

The cardinal resigned as archbishop of Boston in December over his handling of priests who sexually abused children.

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