

Allegation names former teacher

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Diocesan officials have received a second allegation of sexual abuse involving a former teacher at Newark's St. Michael's School, eight years after the first allegation led to the teacher's departure.

The complaints name the late Ted Russell, who taught at St. Michael's from 1970 to 1995. He resigned from his position in 1995 after the Rochester Diocese contacted state officials regarding a sexual-abuse allegation against him. Russell's teaching license was subsequently revoked by the state.

According to Michael Tedesco, diocesan spokesman, the new allegation against Russell arose within the last two months. It claims that Russell, who formerly taught at the junior-high level, sexually abused a St. Michael's student in the late 1980s.

Although Tedesco said this is only the second known allegation of

abuse involving Russell during his tenure at St. Michael's, that number may rise.

"In light of this new allegation, we also are concerned there may be other cases of abuse that have never been reported. We urge anyone with knowledge of any such behavior on the part of Mr. Russell to please come forward. We promise discretion, assistance and direction," stated a June 5 letter to St. Michael's School parents and alumni from Dominican Sister Elizabeth Meegan, diocesan superintendent of schools, and Father Peter Clifford, pastor of St. Michael's Parish.

Sister Meegan and Father Clifford encouraged anyone who has complaints or concerns about Russell to contact the diocese. They can call Barbara Pedeville at 585/328-3228, ext. 1215, or at 800/328-3228, ext. 1215 (outside Monroe County), or Father Robert Ring at 315/730-0882.

"It's part of our policy to deal with these situations openly and trans-



File photo

A school administrator peers into a classroom at St. Michael's School in Newark in this April 22, 2002, file photo. The diocese has received a second allegation of sexual abuse involving a former teacher at the school.

parently," Tedesco said. "We want to see if there's anyone out there who was hurt. This is part of our commitment to provide healing for those affected."

"It is critically important that our schools be safe, secure and holy places for our students to learn and

grow academically, spiritually and emotionally," stated the letter from Sister Meegan and Father Clifford. "To this end, following long-standing diocesan policy, we will not tolerate any inappropriate behavior on the part of any person in our schools who is entrusted with our children."

Church may drop objection to rape-victim bill

Wording of legislation would have to change

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The New York State Catholic Conference, public-policy arm of the state's eight Catholic bishops, would drop its objection to a proposed state law on emergency contraception for rape victims if the bill's language is changed to reflect pro-life concerns, according to Dennis Poust, conference spokesman.

In a phone interview from his Albany office, Poust said that the con-

ference would support the bill if it allowed medical personnel to decline to offer contraception to a rape victim if the assault has already resulted in the conception of a child. Furthermore, the conference also wants language struck from the bill that says "emergency contraception ... does not cause abortions."

"It's a political statement, and it's just not true," Poust said, noting that contraception can make a uterus inhospitable to a fertilized egg, causing the egg to be aborted. The Catholic Church teaches that an unborn child is a person from the moment of conception.

In addition to requesting language changes regarding abortion and allowing medical institutions to decline contraception to a woman who has already conceived, the conference also wants the bill to note that such institutions should only prescribe "medically appropriate" contraception and would not be required to offer contraception if 72 or more hours have passed since an assault, Poust said.

The bill passed the state Assembly Feb. 10, and may be voted on this month in the Senate. Members of the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault — which represents more than 50 organizations, including health-care and religious groups — released a statement June 5 calling for the bill's enactment into law.

"The essence of all true religion is compassion," said the Rev. Tom Davis of the United Church of Christ in Saratoga Springs. "When a woman suffers the brutality of rape, compassion requires — at the very least — that doctors and hospitals help her avoid the further tragedy of an unintended pregnancy."

The Catholic conference has opposed the bill's current wording, which it views as an attempt to force pro-life Catholic institutions out of the health-care business, Poust said.

"I think it's clear that this is about advancing the abortion-rights movement, and it's about redefining the beginning of life to be sometime after conception and generally advancing the culture of death," Poust said.

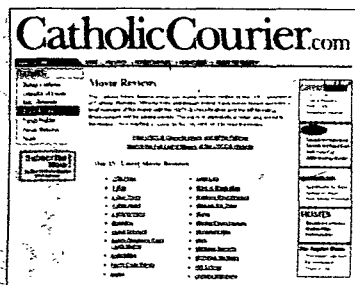
He added that Catholic hospitals in the state already provide emergency contraception to rape victims who have not conceived — and that such provision is consistent with church teaching.

"Catholic teaching on contraception does not apply to rape victims," he said, noting that the U.S. Bishops' "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" addresses the plight of such women in these words:

"A female who has been raped should be able to defend herself against a potential conception from the sexual assault. If, after appropriate testing, there is no evidence that conception has occurred already, she may be treated with medications that would prevent ovulation, sperm capacitation or fertilization. It is not permissible, however, to initiate or to recommend treatments that have as their purpose or direct effect the removal, destruction or interference with the implantation of a fertilized ovum."

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