

## ABUSE CASES DISMISSED

Citing the fact that the statute of limitations had run out, the Appellate Division of New York State Supreme Court has dismissed two sex-abuse lawsuits involving diocesan priests.

The court issued its rulings April 30, according to Paul Yewawich, an attorney representing the Diocese of Rochester.

In the first case, several plaintiffs asked to recover damages and to hold the diocese "vicariously liable" for the alleged actions of Robert O'Neill, a former diocesan priest. Because the alleged abuse took place between 1975 and 1986, the statute of limitations had run out, the court ruled. O'Neill retired in 2001, and Bishop Matthew H. Clark removed him from all ministry in 2002 due to allegations that he had committed sexual abuse in the past.

In the other case, a plaintiff sued the Holy See, the diocese, Bishop Clark and St. John the Evangelist Parish in Spencerport. The John Doe plaintiff sought to recover damages related to abuse allegedly committed against him by Albert Cason, a former diocesan priest removed from ministry in 1985. The abuse allegedly took place while the plaintiff served as an altar server in 1968 or 1969. The suit was dismissed for the same reason as the first suit, Yewawich said.

Diocesan spokesman Doug Mandelaro urged anyone who has ever suffered sexual abuse by a church employee to contact the diocese's victims' advocates, Barbara Pedeville at 585/328-3210 or Father Robert Ring at 315/730-0882, "so that we can begin to help them achieve the healing they so very much deserve," he said.

— Rob Cullivan

# Leaders decry Iraqi abuses

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the disclosures of U.S. military abuse of Iraqi prisoners mounted, religious leaders in the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., the Vatican newspaper and officials of the U.S. Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services added their voices to the criticisms of prisoner treatment.

On May 17, Bishop Matthew H. Clark of the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y. — along with Violet L. Fisher, resident bishop of the United Methodist Church's New York West Area; Edie Gause, interim executive presbyter, Presbytery of the Genesee Valley; Marie C. Jerge, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Upstate New York Synod; Rabbi Laurence Kotok, leader of Temple B'rith Kodesh in Brighton; Jack M. McKelvey, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester; and Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, imam of the Islamic Center of Rochester — signed and released a joint statement against the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and other violence in Iraq, including the beheading of Pennsylvania civilian contractor Nicholas Berg by terrorists.

"We, the undersigned, firmly state that such acts are evil, wrong and are clearly condemned by the three Abrahamic Faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam," the statement read. "As religious leaders, we are horrified and sickened by these events. We pray for restraint, and a peaceful and just ending to the war. Our country is blessed with many diverse faith communities that have worked together and learned from each other. ... We pray that we grow together in our respect and the way we value our diversity, and we pray that together we will be able to heal the wounds of human society."

On May 12, The Sisters of Mercy of Rochester and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester supported a statement issued by the national



Reuters/CNS

An Iraqi boy holds an anti-U.S. sign during a protest by hundreds outside the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad May 5.

Leadership Conference of Women Religious condemning the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. personnel.

Sister of St. Joseph Kathy Weider, a member of her congregation's leadership team, said her order felt compelled to support the statement given the recent revelations of Iraqi prisoner abuse.

"Our charism is to serve our neighbor without distinction," she said. "When we talk about our neighbor, we're talking about everyone on earth."

Sister of Mercy Sheila Stevenson, president of the Sisters of Mercy in Rochester, said her congregation believes all atrocities against any human being anywhere need to be condemned — even if committed by fellow citizens. She added that the abuse of Iraqi prisoners damages American society.

"What is the example we're setting for our children?" she said. "It's ter-

rible."

Both nuns added that recent atrocities committed by U.S. enemies — including Berg's beheading — should also be condemned.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious statement was highly critical of U.S. actions.

"We do not accept the explanation of our government leaders that these acts were the behavior of a few individuals," the statement read. "Rather, we see these abusive actions as symptomatic of a deeper, pervasive sickness. All of us share the responsibility and the blame — the soldiers who performed these heinous acts, military officials who had oversight for the treatment of prisoners, US government officials who ignored reports of these abuses, and all of us who have contributed in some way to our culture of violence."

The May 10 edition of the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, said the photo of a U.S. female soldier holding by a leash a naked Iraqi detainee lying on the floor was "tragically symbolic" because it showed a desire to treat the enemy almost as an animal.

It was the latest criticisms of the abuses by the newspaper.

During a May 7 news conference, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, head of the military archdiocese, called the abuse of Iraqi prisoners of war "outrageous" and said it must be "condemned without equivocation."

The news conference was held the same day that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld testified about the abuses before the Senate Armed Services Committee and the House Armed Services Committee. Rumsfeld apologized for the abuses but warned that still unpublished photos would show worse acts than those already made public.

Contains reporting by Rob Cullivan in Rochester.

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