

Parents, alumni ask for names of priests

Orders refuse to give names of alleged sexual offenders

By BETH MILLER, The News Journal (DE), Tuesday, November 21, 2006

Some alumni and parents of students at Salesianum School and Archmere Academy on Monday urged the religious orders that run the private Catholic schools to release the names of any priests accused of sexual abuse.

Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli last week released the names of 20 priests -- including 18 from the Diocese of Wilmington -- against whom there are substantiated allegations of sexual abuse against minors. He sent letters recommending that each religious order with priests ministering here do likewise, diocesan spokesman Robert G. Krebs said. None has done so yet, but Paul George hopes that will change. George is a 1965 alumnus of Salesianum and the classmate of the Rev. Carmen Vignola, one of the deceased priests on Saltarelli's list.

George said alumni should refuse to donate to any order that keeps the names hidden. "No names, no money," George said. "I feel that we cannot protect any part of the Catholic church that protects people who break the law -- especially pedophiles. If the diocese is giving out names, why can't they?"

Marybeth Phillips of West Chester, Pa., whose son is a senior at Archmere Academy, agreed that all names should be released. She is a Catholic in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, she said, and is more familiar with the problems uncovered there by the Philadelphia district attorney's office. But she believes the names of the accused priests must be released.

"The Roman Catholic Church had better clean up its act and do it quickly," she said. "In spite of the fact that in this country we have a policy of innocent until proven guilty, somehow or other the Roman Catholic Church slipped under the radar. We have to hold them accountable. ... The guys who covered this up should be in jail. They ruined these kids' lives and there's not enough money on the planet to give these kids. They should give them the Vatican jewels, as far as I'm concerned."

Diocesan officials say seven religious order priests have credible allegations against them, but Saltarelli deferred to the orders to release their names. Krebs said that while the diocese knows the names, it did not investigate the allegations and does not know if they were "admitted, corroborated or otherwise substantiated," as those against the priests on the diocese's list were. The diocese has refused to release the names of two diocesan priests, both now deceased, against whom there are credible but not substantiated allegations. Krebs said Monday no nuns or religious order brothers face such allegations.

In addition to releasing the 20 names publicly, Saltarelli has asked Pope Benedict XVI to remove each of the men from the priesthood, which would cut them off from pensions and other church benefits.

The News Journal has learned that of the nine religious orders that have representatives serving in the Diocese of Wilmington, only three have priests with allegations against them: the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, the Norbertine Fathers and the Capuchin Franciscan Friars.

An attorney for the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, who operate Salesianum School, said Friday the Oblates had no plan to release the names of accused priests. The Rev. James B. Begnato of the Norbertine Fathers, who operate Archmere Academy, has not returned phone messages from The News Journal. By Monday, his name had been removed from the directory of residents at the Norbertines' Middletown facility.

The names of three accused religious order priests already have been made public in court documents or recent lawsuits -- the Rev. James W. O'Neill, a former principal at Salesianum, and the Rev. Robert Hermley, both Oblates, and the Rev. Edward Smith, a Norbertine who was on staff at Archmere.

The Eastern Province of Holy Cross Brothers, who operate St. Edmond's Academy, and the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier have no priests. They have only brothers, according to their provincial offices. No Redemptorist priests who have served at Our Lady of Lourdes in Seaford have such allegations against them, according to Marion Lunt, director of communications for the Brooklyn-based order.

Officials of the Capuchin Franciscan Friars, Friars Minor Holy Name Province, Oblate Apostles of Two Hearts, and the U.S. Jesuit Conference did not return phone messages Monday.