

Priests must take sex abuse classes

■ Diocese has not seen problem here

By John McCoolley
QUAD-CITY TIMES

Priests in the Catholic Diocese of Davenport will have to take a sex abuse class in response to problems that have occurred within the Catholic Church.

David Montgomery, the director of communications for the diocese, said Tuesday that a letter already has been sent to all 152 priests in the diocese, informing them of the new requirement.

"All of the priests have been given the policy and are reviewing it," he said.

Meetings to explain the policy will be held next week, and each priest then will take the class, which includes several days' worth

of material.

He stressed that the new requirement is not in response to a prostitution sting in Davenport last month in which a retired Catholic priest was arrested.

"We have been working on this for months. It is part of the process we've been going through, updating all of the policies," he added.

Montgomery said the move is partly in response to sexual abuse allegations in other Midwest dioceses, including those in Chicago and East St. Louis, Ill. In Belleville, Ill., 13 priests and a deacon have been suspended from active ministry since 1993, and those sex abuse cases have cost the diocese more than \$2 million, it was reported last week.

The Catholic Diocese of Peoria, Ill., which has jurisdiction for

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Churches haven't seen problem

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Catholic churches in the Illinois Quad-City area, does not have any such classes scheduled, communications director Kate Kenny said.

"That could change if we see this working well in other dioceses," she added.

Both the Davenport and Peoria dioceses stressed that there have been no incidents in the Quad-City region such as those that have occurred elsewhere in the Midwest

In the Davenport Diocese, one of four in Iowa, the director of human resources will teach the class to all diocesan priests. Those priests will pass the knowledge on to volunteers, daycare workers and others in their churches who work with children.

Montgomery said the classes focus mostly on how to behave around children, and, so far, reaction has been positive.

"We feel it's very necessary for people to be aware of what's going

on out there and respond to problems that are arising," he said.

He added that punishment will be meted out to those who violate the policy.

"Each violation would be handled on a case-by-case basis. The most important thing would be for the person to be removed from the situation immediately," he said.

Montgomery said priests will receive updates once they have completed the classes.

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