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2 former priests from Delbarton in sex charges

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MORRIS TWP - Two former Delbarton priests were caught up last week in the child sex abuse scandal rocking the Catholic Church nationwide.

A former headmaster of the school, the Rev. Bruno Ugliano, who now works a chaplain at Rider University in Lawrenceville, has been accused by a woman that he sexually molested her while she was a teenager in Union County two decades ago before he joined Delbarton.

In a separate incident, former Delbarton teacher, the Rev. Timothy Brennan, who in 1987 pleaded guilty to abusing a 15-year-old boy, was removed from his priestly duties by his supervisors at St. Mary's Abbey in March, just as the sex abuse scandal started gaining nationwide attention. However, Brennan, who hasn't officially lived in the area for three years, said mass for the diocese in Rochester, N.Y., up until a few weeks ago without the diocese being aware of his conviction.

In the Ugliano matter, the Newark diocese said last Monday representatives had met with the alleged victim and had determined the allegations from the woman are credible enough to warrant a full investigation.

Ugliano was headmaster at Delbarton from 1985 to 1990. He was accused of having sex with the girl in the early 1980s when he was at St. Elizabeth's Church in Linden. Ugliano's attorney, Michael Critchley, denied the allegations and said Ugliano does not have a recollection of the woman. Critchley added that some church officials have reacted to the ever-widening scandal too quickly to remove some priests from their jobs. "This is devastating to my client," Critchley said. "Everything he's worked for all his life is called into question.

Steven Emery, a spokesman for the Trenton diocese, said Thursday the Benedictine order to which Ugliano belongs has begun to investigate the allegations but has not yet made any decision on what to do with the priest.

Although a charter adopted by a national conference of Bishops in Dallas three weeks ago calls for the removal of a priest involved in the sexual assault of minors, the Benedictines have yet to vote on whether to accept the charter, Emery said.

But he added that because the post at Rider falls under the control of the Trenton diocese, Bishop John Smith would determine whether Ugliano might remain in his post.

The Rev. Thomas Confroy, St. Mary's abbot and Delbarton president, issued a statement last Tuesday. "The abbey has asked its attorneys to pursue aggressively a complete evaluation of the allegations and we will decide on an appropriate course of action once all relevant information has come to light and been evaluated. Not all allegations are alike and we will not rush to precipitous judgments on incomplete evidence when the reputation and future of an individual hangs in the balance."

He added the Benedictines are in support of "zero tolerance" and will vote on the bishops' charter in the very near future.

The allegations came to light last Tuesday when Mendham Township resident Ben "Buddy" Cotton held a press conference outside the gates of Delbarton. He said the woman, now 38, was 14 years old when the incident occurred and that three priests were involved, including Ugliano. Cotton said the woman had spoken to one priest because she wanted to talk about her mother, who was dying of cancer. The priest allegedly told her that as part of her penance

she would have to perform specific sex acts. Cotton said all three priests used the same line and the woman thought they were passing her around and talking about her among themselves.

The two other priests, the Rev. Edward Eilert, pastor of St. Philomenas in Livingston, and the Rev. Joseph Rice, a chaplain at the Bergen Regional Health Care Center in Paramus, have been temporarily removed from their duties by the Newark diocese.

The alleged victim, who now lives in North Carolina, had first contacted Mark Serrano, a former Mendham resident now living in Virginia and an official with a national group called the Survivor's Network. According to Cotton, Serrano said the woman had gone to church officials in October but her accusations were ignored. The woman had attended a meeting in Mendham last weekend of victims of abuse by priests that began in April and had been organized by Serrano.

The meetings were initially designed for victims of the Rev. James T. Hanley, a former pastor of the Church of St. Joseph in Mendham, but they have drawn people from other areas, Cotton said.

The woman's attorney, Greg Gianfarcaro of Warren, also formerly of Mendham, said he has not yet decided on whether to file a civil suit, noting the statute of limitations for such cases is two years.

At Rider, Anthony Campbell, the university's vice president of student affairs, issued the following statement last Tuesday. "Rider University is shocked by the recent allegations filed against Father Bruno Ugliano. Students, faculty and staff have expressed great respect for ■

Father Bruno and Rider University has never received an allegation of wrongdoing. We will monitor the situation and make appropriate decisions as facts become available."

Brennan Pled Guilty

In the matter involving Rev. Brennan, officials of the diocese in Rochester, N.Y., said they would not have allowed Brennan to function as a priest had they known of his infraction, according to reports.

In a statement from Confroy, his second in less than a week involving priests from Delbarton, he said, "His (Brennan's) priestly duties were suspended three months ago, in accordance with the newly evolved standards and expectations of society." Confroy was not at Delbarton when Brennan was transferred.

For the past three years he has been living at a Benedictine monastery, Mount Savior, in Elmira, N.Y. after being sent there by Delbarton, Confroy said.

He helped out at the local church there by often saying mass, according to Martin Boler, Mount Savior's prior. Boler said officials at nursing homes and churches where Brennan worked were not told of the priest's guilty plea and the Rochester diocese was not notified Brennan was functioning as a priest in Elmira. Boler said it was not necessary to notify the diocese because the Benedictine order is autonomous and answers directly to the Vatican rather than to any diocese.

Boler said Brennan had no contact with children during his stay at Mount Savior.

Confroy said St. Mary's officials reported the accusations against Brennan to law enforcement authorities when they occurred. After his guilty plea, Brennan was sent to a treatment center and worked in a parish in Lakewood, where he cared for elderly in nursing homes. He was later sent to Elmira but returned to New Jersey on occasions for further psychological counseling.

"At no time since his removal from the abbey has he returned to live at St. Mary's," Confroy said. "He has not returned to St. Mary's (since his suspension three months ago) except to place his personal belongings in storage, and has not resumed any priestly duties."

Brennan was sentenced to one-year probation on Jan. 21, 1987 at the Morris County Courthouse. Abbey officials at the time said Brennan would remain a priest but would not be allowed to teach children.
