

# Reopening old wounds

## Priest's picture in directory spurs report of sex abuse

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NORMAL — Susan Ottis Tromp said she is tired of hiding the sexual abuse that marred her childhood and kindled a lingering anger that surfaces when she recalls the Catholic priest she says molested her more than 40 years ago.

The decision to report the abuse came after she saw the priest's photograph in a directory at her mother's home in December.

"My reaction was of horror. I was just in shock," said Ottis Tromp, upset that her abuser was profiled in a history of St. Mary's Parish.

Ottis Tromp was a third-grader at St. Mary's School in Bloomington when she said the molestation by the late Rev. **Victorian Ostmeyer** began. She said it continued for about four years, until he left. **Ostmeyer** was a Franciscan friar with the Cincinnati-based Province of St. John the Baptist who was transferred to Ohio, where he died in 1970 at age 63.

After speaking with parish leaders, Ottis Tromp and her therapist met with the Rev. James Van Vurst, the Franciscan's provincial from Ohio, who handles abuse cases for the



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**Susan Ottis Tromp**

*responding after seeing a church directory with a photo of a priest she said abused her decades ago*

"The wording was very generic. It said nothing about the priest. I asked for his name and the dates," she said.

Van Vurst offered to ask the diocese again, but a second notice was similarly vague. "I know you were disappointed and I can see why," he said in an e-mail reply to Ottis Tromp sent Feb. 1.

In addition, Ottis Tromp objects to a one-year limitation by the Franciscans on covering counseling costs.

"I feel that by limiting my therapy to 52 sessions, the church is indeed telling me, 'We want to help you, but get over it in a year's time,'" Ottis Tromp wrote to Van Vurst on March 11.

Nancy Ottis shares her daughter's anger and carries guilt over her child's reported concerns about the priest.

"I remember her coming to me and saying, 'I feel really funny because he puts me on his lap and jiggles his legs.' I never doubted what she said. I just told her to stay away from him. I expected this little child to stay away from a grown man," said Ottis, adding, "My religion is hanging by a thread, but not my faith."

She still attends St. Mary's Church while her daughter attends a nondenominational church and plans to use \$500 from the Franciscans to attend a conference sponsored by Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests.

order. Van Vurst offered to pay counseling bills and consider other requests to help her recover.

The quick response is part of the Franciscan policy on abuse, said Van Vurst.

"We take very seriously any allegation of abuse," said Van Vurst, adding no other cases have been reported against **Ostmeyer**.

He declined to talk about the specifics of the Twin City case, but said, "I believe what she said."

Officials with the Catholic Diocese of Peoria did not return calls from The Pantagraph. Ottis Tromp, who lives in Normal, said the diocese has not contacted her.

As part of their offer, the Franciscans asked the diocese to publish a notice about the abuse in bulletins at St. Mary's and at a Metamora school where **Ostmeyer** also served. Ottis Tromp was disappointed with the results.