

Priest won't return to Buford church

Cleric is second to leave parish in last few weeks

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As about 700 parishioners sat in silence, Monsignor David Talley told them Saturday that the **Rev. John Anderson**, their priest of three years, would not be returning to Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Buford.

Anderson, 37, told his congregation last weekend that he wanted to take a sabbatical to deal with being abused as a child.

He is the second priest to leave the parish within the past few weeks. The first was the **Rev. Sergio Calle-Perez**, a Colombian priest credited with building the church's Hispanic community. Some parishioners say the

departure also is tied to conflict between the two men.

The congregation had anticipated Anderson would celebrate Mass this weekend and attend a parish barbecue in his honor Saturday, but Talley said Anderson was already gone.

"It has been decided that that Father John would step down as pastor," Talley said. "The archbishop believes it would be in the best interest for you and for Father John."

Deacon Bill Speed read a statement from Anderson, saying that the news coverage of his statements made it impossible for him to come to the church.

"I didn't intend for all the media attention," Speed read. He said Anderson urged the congregation to pray for him and for the church.

Talley, who met with Anderson last week, described Anderson's anguish as he contemplated leaving the 2,000-family

congregation.

Following Anderson's announcement last weekend, many parishioners petitioned Archbishop John Donoghue to allow Anderson to return as pastor when he has completed his leave.

Steve McReynolds of Braselton said the sudden departure was disorienting, especially following the loss of **Calle-Perez** about a month ago.

"It is somewhat bewildering," McReynolds said. "But [Anderson] had personal crisis in his life and it attracted so much attention. Father John . . . was very kind to everyone."

But others remembered Anderson less fondly and said the departure of the two priests are connected.

"Nobody seems to want to address it," said parishioner Kathleen Sowers, a friend of **Calle-Perez**.

"There's still no closure with Father **Sergio** and the two cases are linked."

The tension between the

two priests reached the archbishop.

Calle-Perez said Anderson's statements from the pulpit last weekend were a "ploy to gain sympathy."

Calle-Perez expressed sorrow over the upheaval in the parish.

Anderson didn't return repeated telephone calls Friday and Saturday. Donoghue was out of state and could not be reached Saturday night.

Matt Coles, a lawyer with the firm representing the archdiocese, said Donoghue has talked to both priests.

Coles said the archbishop recognized that "two factions" had developed in the church.

"The archbishop made the decision that the mission of the parish, like the mission of any parish, is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ," Coles said.

"To the extent that factions are detracting from that goal, it's not healthy for any parish."