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NATION



Astronauts lauded

Astronaut Frank Borman and other Gemini astronauts who once rode in spacehips to the moon ride in convertibles in a parade at Cape Canaveral for their induction into the Astronaut Hall of Fame. 13A.

Three priests get treatment

Keleher says they broke vows

By Doug Kaufman

Belleville News-Democrat

GERMANTOWN — Bishop James Keleher said Saturday night the three Belleville Diocese priests who face allegations of sexual misconduct broke their church vows.

"The reported incidents are certainly violations of our Catholic moral code and our vow of celibacy," Keleher told approximately 500 parishioners at St. Boniface Catholic Church in Germantown.

All three priests are getting treatment, Keleher said. "They are receiving therapy and I am in constant contact with them," he said.

Keleher declined to comment on whether the priests receiving treatment is an acknowledgment of guilt on their part.

Keleher said over the years he had heard rumors of sexual misconduct involving Belleville Diocese priests and investigated them.

"Our investigations may not have always been as thorough as they could have been. Mistakes have been made and I apologize for any mistakes. But I believe that we have learned and are learning with each allegation to respond in a better and more appropriate way," he said.

St. Boniface was the parish of the Rev. James Calhoun, whose resignation Thursday was the second of three in the past two weeks involving Belleville Diocese priests. Calhoun was accused of sexual misconduct more than 10 years ago with a young adult.

The Rev. Robert Vonnahmen of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Elizabethtown also resigned Thursday because of alleged sexual misconduct involving a minor more than 10 years ago with a young adult.

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Diocese parishioners are shaken by resignations

By Doug Kaufman

Belleville News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — Bishop James Keleher summed it up last week in a letter to Belleville Diocese priests when he acknowledged it has been a tough time for the diocese.

"My brothers, how has your Lent been going? Let me guess — a bit tougher than usual," he wrote.

The diocese has been shaken the past two weeks by the resignations of three priests because of allegations of sexual misconduct.

Five people recently have told the Belleville News-Democrat about allegations of sexual abuse involving nine priests, including one who claimed that a ring of homosexual priests operates in the diocese. All said they met with Keleher at separate times over the past six years.

Since March 6, the diocese has announced the resignations of the Rev. Jerome Rattermann at Blessed Sacrament Church in Belleville, the Rev. James Calhoun at St. Boniface Church

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Church

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in Germantown and the Rev. Robert Vonnahmen at St. Joseph's Church in Elizabethtown.

The priests were asked to resign in keeping with what the diocese says is its policy of investigating allegations of sexual abuse by priests.

The Belleville Diocese includes 28 counties and covers 12,000 square miles in Southern Illinois.

"There are so many rumors going around," said Roger Wigginton, school board president at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Belleville. "People don't know what to believe and what not to believe. Everything's so secretive about who's making these allegations."

Wigginton is a member of a support team formed to help parishioners at Blessed Sacrament cope. He said many people are having trouble dealing with the resignations and still have doubts about the allegations.

"This is a very touchy situation," he said. "It's very difficult for any faith to accept. People are having to accept this just on what's being said."

David Clohessy, founder of the St. Louis chapter of Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), said the resignations are a good sign that something is being done.

"It's a step in the right direction," he said, "but it certainly doesn't get to the bottom of the barrel."

Clohessy said he is pleased the diocese is removing priests to investigate allegations of sexual misconduct, but more needs to be done.

"If they take corrective measures in secrecy, that almost undermines the benefit of whatever steps they do take," he said.

Here's what's been reported:

● On Feb. 20, the News-Democrat told the story of a 39-year-old man raised in the Belleville Diocese who claimed to have been raped more than 20 years ago by a priest still active in the diocese. The man said he was frustrated because he told the diocese about the abuse several years ago and no action was taken.

● On March 6, Keleher announced that Rattermann had been asked to resign because of alleged sexual misconduct that occurred more than 20 years ago. Keleher said he learned of the charge six years ago and investigated, but concluded at the time there was no reason to remove Rattermann from his parish.

● On March 8, it was revealed that Rattermann had been accused of sexual misconduct while the principal at Mater Dei High School in Brees, where he served in 1968-69. The alleged misconduct involved Rattermann making sexual advances to high school boys on a houseboat on Carlyle Lake. No charges were filed, but Rattermann was transferred from Mater Dei and reassigned.

● On March 11, a report surfaced that the diocese was making truck payments and helping pay criminal fines for a Carlyle man who accused a diocese priest of sexually abusing him years earlier.

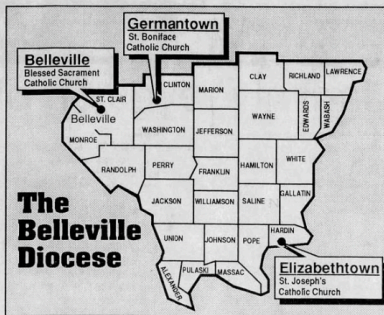
● On March 12, a Belleville Diocese priest told the News-Democrat that morale among priests was "really down," and that priests were ashamed because of the allegations about Rattermann.

● On March 13, Clohessy said he has received seven allegations of sexual abuse involving three Belleville Diocese priests in the past five months. One of the victims came forward after reading the story Feb. 20 in the News-Democrat.

● On March 14, a former Belleville man said he was the recipient of an unwanted sexual advance more than 30 years ago by a Belleville Diocese priest who remains active in the diocese.

And a friend of another victim said her friend, an adult male, claimed to have been sexually abused by a Belleville Diocese priest in 1991. Although the alleged abuse was reported to the diocese that same year, the priest was not disciplined or removed from his parish, the woman said.

● On Wednesday, the News-Democrat reported that Keleher had called a meeting of diocese priests for



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● On Wednesday, the News-Democrat reported that Keleher had called a meeting of diocese priests for

April 2 to discuss what the diocese is doing to address recent allegations of sexual misconduct by priests.

● On Thursday, a diocese spokesman told parishioners in Germantown that Calhoun had resigned because of an allegation of sexual misconduct involving a young adult more than 10 years ago. That same night, in a hastily called meeting at the church in Elizabethtown, the diocese said that Vonnahmen had been asked to resign because of alleged sexual abuse that occurred more than 25 years ago involving a minor.

● On Saturday, the News-Democrat told the story of a 30-year-old St. Clair County man who claimed to have been abused by two priests and a deacon, all of whom were part of an alleged homosexual ring of Belleville Diocese priests. He said the ring was reported to Keleher five years ago. He again reported the abuse and homosexual ring on March 6 to Monsignor Bernard Sullivan, vicar general of the diocese, and met privately on March 8 with Keleher.

● Saturday night, Keleher told parishioners in Germantown the three priests who resigned broke their church vows and are receiving treatment. He encouraged victims to report allegations of sexual abuse involving priests to the diocese.

In announcing Rattermann's resignation, Keleher said the allegation brought to him six years ago was the only allegation of sexual abuse involving a child he has received since he became bishop in 1984.

But a diocese spokesman said Friday that the allegation against Vonnahmen first was reported in February.

Keleher

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25 years ago. On March 6, the Rev. Jerome Rattermann of Blessed Sacrament Church in Belleville resigned because of alleged sexual misconduct that occurred more than 20 years ago.

Keleher cut short a Vatican meeting with the pope and other Midwest bishops to come to St. Boniface to discuss the allegations and comfort parishioners.

"I wanted to be with you in this moment of difficulty because you are my people and this is where I belong," Keleher said.

Keleher also will lead 9 a.m. Mass today at St. Joseph's in Elizabethtown. Keleher, who said he had returned to the area in the past 24 hours, said he was not aware of a report Saturday in the Belleville News-Democrat about an alleged ring of homosexual priests. When told of the allegations, he said: "I have no comment about that."

During the Mass, Keleher sympathized with the victims.

"My heart truly goes out to anybody who has suffered such terrible wrong," Keleher said.

He also consoled parishioners.

"For you, the revelations are shocking. For some, it may shake their faith to its foundations," he said.

Keleher admitted to being shocked by some of the reported cases.

"When some of this first came to me, I simply couldn't believe it," he said.

Keleher said he had heard stories of abuse elsewhere from other bishops, but never thought it could happen here.

"But when it comes home to you, oh, my," Keleher said, his voice full of emotion, "the impact is much greater."

He also talked about how this has affected other priests in the diocese.

"The information that has come to light over the last few weeks sheds a pall over all of them. The vast majority of our priests are good men dedicated to you, their people, working hard to serve you and the church. They are human — like I am — and have to struggle with life just as you do, but this has laid on them a burden of pain and shame they surely do not deserve."

Keleher said sexual molestation is a disease and "the church will do everything to cooperate with civil authorities. We will also do a conscientious internal investigation."

He encouraged victims to come forward.

"I pray anybody hurt in any matter will not fear to come to me. We will give them professional counseling and pastoral care," he said.

Alan Alvers, a parishioner, said he



AFTER MASS: Bishop Keleher greets St. Boniface parishioners

thought Keleher "handled it very well."

Of the allegations about Calhoun, he added: "The man is human. If it's true, he should suffer the consequences just like I did it or you did it."

Dave Jansen, a member of the parish council at St. Boniface, said the announcement about Calhoun came as a surprise.

"I think most people are shocked," he said. "And I think most people are feeling compassion for Father Calhoun. They know what he did — if it is true — was wrong. But he's also a good man and a good priest."

In a brief discussion with the news

media after Mass, Keleher said Margie Messen, a sexual abuse counselor with Catholic Social Services in Belleville, will leave her post to become a full-time administrator to review sex abuse cases involving priests.

Messen will have an office separate from the diocese chancery office to ensure confidentiality. The diocese also will establish an 800 number to report cases of sexual abuse involving priests.

In the meantime, Keleher said reports of sexual abuse involving priests can be reported to Monsignor Bernard Sullivan at the chancery office, 277-8181.