

Priest named in complaint

Tour guide says sex was demanded

By Marilyn Vise

Belleville News-Democrat

A 32-year-old Carbondale man has filed a complaint against the Rev. Robert Vonnahmen alleging the Belleville Diocese priest insisted on sexual favors in exchange for employment.

The charge, made with the Illinois Department of Human Rights, was filed by William Thomas Boyd, a tour guide for Catholic Shrine Pilgrimage Inc., Golden Frontier Tours, against the company, Vonnahmen and the Belleville Diocese.

Boyd's charge states: "Rev. Vonnahmen stated that a condition of employment is that of sexual submission



Vonnahmen

to him. When I refused to submit to him any further, he told me my attitude was hostile and demanded my resignation."

The charge was filed with the Department of Human Rights about two weeks ago, said Jackie Lustig, a spokesman for the department.

Lustig said the department's investigation of the charge could take six months to a year. If investigators find substantial evidence that the misconduct occurred, they will file the charge with the Human Rights Commission, she said.

Gerald Montroy, a Belleville attorney who is representing Vonnahmen and Catholic Shrine Pilgrimage Inc., said the charge is an attempt to get money from his clients and the diocese.

"The charge isn't true," Montroy said.

See COMPLAINT/3A

Robbery suspect's attorney seeks whereabouts of priest

By Teri Maddox

Belleville News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — The attorney for a robbery suspect wants a judge to force the Catholic Diocese of Belleville to reveal the whereabouts of the Rev. James Calhoun, who was removed from his parish in March because of sexual-misconduct allegations.

The motion to compel, filed Wednesday in St. Clair County Circuit Court by assistant public defender Walter Brandon, states that Calhoun is



Burrell



Calhoun

needed as a witness in the trial of Samson Burrell, 19, of East St. Louis.

See WITNESS/3A

Complaint

Continued from 1A

Catholic Shrine Pilgrimage Inc. is a non-profit tour agency based in Belleville and is not affiliated with the Belleville Diocese. Vonnahmen is listed as the company's registered agent with the Illinois secretary of state.

Sister Michelle Emmerich, a spokesman for the diocese, said diocesan officials were aware that the charge had been filed.

However, she said because the tour company is a "separate and unrelated activity" from the diocese, the diocese intends to file a motion to dismiss.

Boyd, who still is employed as a tour guide at Catholic Shrine Pilgrimage Inc., declined comment and referred all questions to his attorneys.

In a joint statement, Boyd's attorneys, Diane Speir of Makanda and Therese H. Thien of Marion, said: "We are not surprised by the denial made by Rev. Vonnahmen or his attorney. This is typical of the Catholic Church in blaming the victim for the sexual misconduct of its priests."

Boyd did not resign his job the day Vonnahmen allegedly demanded the resignation, Speir said.

Montroy said that Boyd claims the incident took place in January, but the charge was not filed with the Human

Rights Department until April and after the removal of several Belleville Diocese priests attracted much publicity.

"He (Boyd) is claiming this occurred on the day of a staff meeting in January," Montroy said. "There were all kinds of other people around. This is an attempt by the petitioner to capitalize on earlier charges made public."

Vonnahmen is one of five priests asked to leave his parish after being accused of sexual misconduct with a minor. This alleged misconduct is claimed to have occurred more than 25 years ago.

On March 17, Vonnahmen stepped down as pastor at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Elizabethtown. Vonnahmen also was founder of Camp Ondessonk, a summer retreat for Catholic children, and served as its director for many years.

Emmerich said the charge filed with the Human Rights Department was not the reason Vonnahmen was asked to leave his parish.

The Revs. Jerome Ratemann of Blessed Sacrament in Belleville, James Calhoun of St. Boniface in Germantown, David Crook of St. George in New Baden and Robert Chlopecki of St. Ann Church in Nashville also have been removed from their parishes pending the diocese's investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct.

Witness

Continued from 1A

Burrell is accused of two armed robberies at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville last August. He also has alleged sexual relationships with four priests in the diocese, starting when Burrell was about 15 years old.

Brandon said his efforts to locate Calhoun have been unsuccessful and that the lack of information from the diocese "has been tantamount to the obstruction of justice in the defendant's preparation of his defense."

In a prepared statement, Sister Michelle Emmerich, spokesman for Bishop James Keleher, replied: "The diocese has not refused to disclose the location of Father Calhoun. After consultation with legal counsel, the diocese is confident that it has done

nothing to obstruct justice, and the diocese intends to cooperate fully with the court." The diocese knows where Calhoun is, she added.

A trial date for Burrell had been expected to be set Tuesday. However, timing could be affected by whether the court grants the motion to compel and when that decision is made, Brandon said. Associate Judge Robert LeChien is presiding.

Originally, Judge Michael O'Malley was assigned to the case. He removed himself earlier this month for an unspecified reason. Before becoming a judge, O'Malley served as an attorney for the Catholic Diocese of Belleville.

In another motion, Brandon has requested a jury trial in the case. After his arrest in September, Burrell waived his right to a jury trial. A bench trial was scheduled in April, but Brandon

requested a continuance, citing new evidence.

Since that time, Brandon has been investigating alleged relationships between Burrell and the priests. Burrell said the relationships included out-of-town trips, weekend visits and sex in hotel rooms and rectories.

On March 18, Calhoun was asked by Keleher to step down as pastor of St. Boniface Catholic Church in Germantown. He is one of five Belleville diocese priests removed since March 6 because of allegations of sexual misconduct.

Keleher said the removals would give the accused priests time to deal with the allegations and participate in an investigation. Church officials have declined to release the whereabouts of the five priests to parishioners or the press.