

Pope picks panel to examine abuse

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pope John Paul II has appointed a committee of Vatican and U.S. Catholic Church officials to study whether to make it easier to dismiss sexually abusive clergy from the priesthood.



The new committee, formed at the request of **John Paul II** U.S. bishops, will look specifically at whether the church's five-year statute of limitations on dismissals can be lifted in cases involving sexual

abuse of minors, church officials said Monday.

The panel also will study whether the age when individuals are considered minors can be raised from 16 to 18 and whether abusive priests can be dismissed even if their actions resulted from mental illness, said Deacon Christopher Baumann, a spokesman for the U.S. Catholic Conference.

Since March, six priests and a deacon in the Belleville Catholic Diocese have faced various allegations of sexual misconduct. Five of the priests were removed from their parishes, one was forced to resign and the deacon was put on administrative leave.

See **POPE/3A**

Pope

Continued from 1A

The Belleville Diocese priests who have been accused of sexual misconduct and the parishes they last served are:

- Rev. Jerome Ratermann, Blessed Sacrament Church in Belleville.
- Rev. James Calhoun, St. Boniface Church in Germantown.
- Rev. Robert Vonnahmen, St. Joseph Church in Elizabethtown.
- Rev. David Crook, St. George Church in New Baden.
- Rev. Robert Chlopecki, St. Ann

Church in Nashville.

- Rev. Eugene Linnemann, St. Patrick Church in Ruma.

Deacon Francis Theis has been accused of sexual misconduct. He is on administrative leave from his job as manager of the gift shop at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, and he also served as a deacon at St. Augustine of Canterbury Church in Belleville. He voluntarily suspended his deaconate activities March 19.

In a letter to U.S. bishops released Monday, the pontiff said he has become aware during the last few

months how much U.S. Catholics are suffering because of clergy scandals.

Leaders of the 55-million member Catholic Church in the United States, who have been buffeted by a series of reports of priestly pedophilia, last week established a committee of bishops to address the problem.

In personal meetings with the pope, many bishops have expressed particular concern about their ability under canon law to dismiss a priest whose moral and psychological condition precludes his return to ministry.