

Our viewpoint

Diocesan secrets

The Belleville Diocese once again has the public wondering what's going on with its terse acknowledgment that Msgr. Joseph Schwaegel will not be re-assigned to a parish.

Schwaegel has been waiting for his next assignment since May, after completing months of treatment for what he and the diocese have said were stress and emotional problems. The fact that the diocese isn't returning him to parish work — and is refusing to say what he will be doing instead — makes it appear, rightly or wrongly, that the diocese is covering up for one of its priests.

Six Belleville Diocese priests have been removed from their parishes this year because of alleged sexual misconduct, four of them permanently. Many people probably are wondering whether Schwaegel is the seventh.

Previously, when we asked the diocese whether Schwaegel left because of allegations of a sexual nature, the diocese said no. But this week, when we asked again, the answer was no comment.

Schwaegel denies he left because of allegations of sexual misconduct, but he added this explanation: "I define sexual misconduct as sex with a minor or a non-consenting adult... A priest involved in any sexual activity is violating church law, but he is not engaged in sexual misconduct unless he is doing so with a minor or non-consenting adult."

We think the diocese is doing the public a disservice by refusing to explain about Schwaegel. Schwaegel is still a diocese priest, and according to a diocese spokesman, he could be reassigned to parish work in the future. Until the questions are answered, it's going to be difficult for Schwaegel and the diocese to move ahead.