

Our viewpoint

The questions remain

As Bishop James Keleher left for his new job as archbishop of Kansas City, Kan., he issued a written statement mentioning the need for church leadership regarding sexual abuse.

It's too bad for the people of the Belleville Diocese that Keleher didn't heed his own words. He could have provided leadership by answering the many questions regarding the priests who have been accused of sexual misconduct. Instead he hid behind vague written statements and a diocesan spokesman. The bishop began refusing our requests for interviews in February, when the allegations of sexual misconduct first surfaced, and he refused to answer questions even on his way out of town.

Most troubling, Keleher left without deciding the cases of two priests and a deacon accused of sexual misconduct. Keleher originally said their cases would be resolved by July 1, then never explained why they weren't. Will Keleher's interim replacement resolve these cases, or will they be left until a new bishop is named, probably next year?

He left without explaining why **Msgr. Joseph Schwaegel** was refused an assignment in a parish. Was the decision made because of allegations of a sexual nature involving **Schwaegel**? The bishop also didn't explain what's being done about the priest who paid \$200 to a male prostitute.

Keleher left without saying whether he knew five years ago of alleged sexual abuse by priests, as one victim claims. He left without commenting on another victim's allegations of a homosexual ring of priests operating in the diocese. Did Keleher look into those allegations, or did he ignore them?

And is there more to come? We've heard allegations against other priests, and believe the diocese has, too. Is it possible that other priests will be removed from their parishes, or is this it?

Keleher was installed as archbishop on Wednesday, but the questions in Belleville remain. Let's hope his successor will take Keleher's parting statement to heart, and provide leadership by dealing openly and honestly with the questions left behind.