

MARYLAND/REGION

Baltimore priest faces charge of child sex abuse 23 years ago

By Frank P.L. Somerville
Staff Writer

A 65-year-old Roman Catholic priest has been removed as associate pastor of a large parish in East Baltimore over a recent allegation that he sexually abused a boy about 23 years ago, an archdiocesan spokesman said yesterday.

The Rev. James Toulas, a member of the Redemptorist religious order, is one of two priests of the Baltimore archdiocese currently on administrative leave and undergoing psychological testing and treatment at undisclosed locations because of child sex-abuse accusations, said Rob Rehg, the spokesman.

The other is the Rev. Maurice J. Blackwell, 47, removed early last month as pastor of St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church in West Baltimore after a teen-ager told police and archdiocesan officials that he was sexually abused by the priest.

Father Toulas was removed Sept. 10 from his post at Our Lady of Fatima Church at 6400 E. Pratt St., immediately after archdiocesan officials learned of the allegations, Mr. Rehg said.

The parishioners were informed at a crowded meeting on Sept. 19.

At the church yesterday, all questions were referred to Redemptorist officials at their provincial headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y. According to a statement from them, the alleged

"inappropriate touching" by Father Toulas, a Baltimore native, was said to have occurred at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Foster Avenue and Conkling Street. The priest, who was working as a missionary in Brazil at the time, was home on vacation, they said.

The officials refused to disclose the precise date of the alleged incident or give any other details, saying they wished to protect the identity of the man making the accusation.

Church officials said yesterday that they were seeking corroboration, and any one with pertinent information about Father Toulas was asked to call Monsignor W. Francis Malooly, chancellor of the archdiocese, at 547-5446.

Mr. Rehg said that "the police are not involved" in the Toulas case, as they were in the allegation against Father Blackwell.

Baltimore State's Attorney Stuart O. Simms recently announced he would not prosecute Father Blackwell because of insufficient evidence, but the priest remains in seclusion as he "completes the evaluation process," Mr. Rehg said.

It is anticipated that Archbishop William H. Keeler and Father Blackwell will meet "in the next few weeks" to discuss the pastor's future, including the possibility that he might return to St. Edward's, the spokesman said.

Parish leaders have asked that

Father Blackwell return.

There are precedents in the archdiocese for the return of a priest to pastoral duties after he has been accused of sexual misconduct.

The Rev. A. Joseph Maskell, who had been pastor of Holy Cross Church in South Baltimore since 1982, was removed in May and underwent psychological counseling and evaluation following an accusation of sexual misconduct with "a young woman," Mr. Rehg said.

However, "during an evaluation process, the accusation could not be corroborated," the spokesman said, and Father Maskell was put in charge of a large Howard County parish, St. Augustine's in Elkridge, on Aug. 9.

The Toulas case is the fourth involving alleged sexual misconduct by a priest of the Baltimore archdiocese to receive publicity since Aug. 21, when the Rev. Thomas W. Smith, 68, pastor of St. Stephen's Church in Bradshaw, committed suicide following such accusations.

Since then, attention has focused on the Blackwell case and on the out-of-court settlement of a \$100 million lawsuit brought against the archdiocese and the Capuchin religious order by a woman who was molested as a teen-ager by Richard G. Deakin, then assistant pastor of St. Martin's Church in West Baltimore.

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