

Bishop: Abuse allegations used to be covered up

By The Associated Press

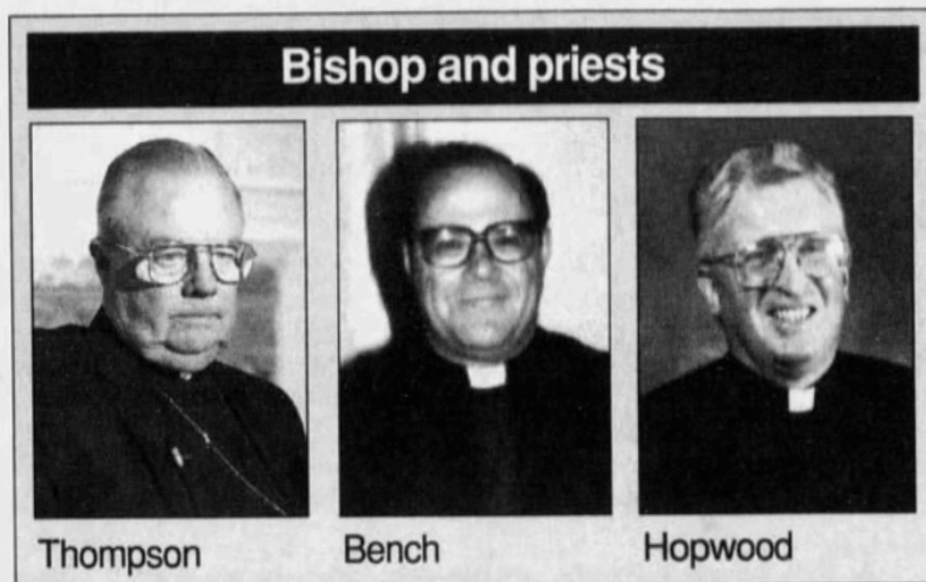
CHARLESTON, S.C. — The Roman Catholic Church must deal with allegations of sexual improprieties against priests openly, instead of covering them up as it did in the past, Bishop David B. Thompson said.

Thompson, who as bishop for the Diocese of Charleston supervises priests in South Carolina, said the discovery of abuse or sexual improprieties cannot be dealt with as it used to be.

"We have to face up to it honestly and candidly and respecting everybody's rights," Thompson told *The Post and Courier* of Charleston.

In the past, allegations were "definitely" covered up, and priests were sent to retreats for counseling, Thompson said. Eventually, they were reassigned to other parishes.

"But now it's much more than a moral issue," Thompson said. "It's a



psychopathic issue. It's a character-defect issue that has rendered it impossible for a bishop to reassign somebody who has been so afflicted, caught up in this and guilty of it."

Thompson's comments come as two priests from South Carolina

are being accused of sexual abuse of minors.

One case involves a Pickens County priest who may not face prosecution because the father of the youth has declined to go forward.

The Rev. John Bench, 55, re-

signed from his parish, although his attorney, Allvin Johnson of Pickens, said Friday that Bench does not plan to quit the priesthood.

The other case involves Monsignor Frederick J. Hopwood, 68, of Greenville, who was accused by several Charleston men of abusing them between the 1950s and 1980s when they were in local Catholic schools and churches.

Diocese officials hope to give an update Monday on where the cases stand. Officials said Hopwood has been ordered by the church to undergo psychiatric evaluation.

Neither man has been charged with violating church or state law.

Solicitor David Schwacke said interviews would be scheduled this week with some of the people who say they were abused by Hopwood.

South Carolina has 97,501 Roman Catholics out of a state population of about 3.6 million.