

NEWS

City reacts to progress on priest abuse issue



By **NATALIE WAGER**

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — The Rev. Robert J. LeFevre of St. Peter’s Church on Broadway thinks it’s a good idea to make it easier to remove priests guilty of pedophilia. “That type of behavior is not consistent with being a minister of the gospel,” LeFevre said. “A priest is someone who is called to heal, to reconcile and to help people, not take advantage of them.” At the end of two days of talks, American Roman Catholic leaders said Wednesday they would recommend a special process to defrock any priest who has become “notorious and is guilty of the serial, predatory sexual abuse of minors.” The church leaders did not, however, agree to a zero-tolerance policy to dismiss all abusive clergy. Priests accused of sexual misconduct will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and cases that are not “notorious” will be left up to the local bishop to decide if the priest is a threat to children and should be removed. LeFevre, an ordained Catholic priest for 36 years, said he has never dealt with a sexual misconduct case. He said he would not have a problem reporting an abusive cleric to the proper authorities, but said it is important to make sure justice is involved for the alleged perpetrator and the alleged victim. There must be some substance to the claim, he said. “If you can’t trust a priest, who can you trust? It’s sad this society doesn’t have somewhere to turn to, especially in religious cases,” said Kelly Pressley of Saratoga Springs. “I don’t think just because they’re priests they should be above the law.” Pressley feels the Catholic religion is full of holes. She said she no longer believes in the Catholic structure and that is why she is no longer a member of the religion. LeFevre said he feels a sense of betrayal about the sex abuse scandal surrounding the church. In a sense, it is a revelation, he said, because it is not something that is a part of most priests’ lives. “I’m very sad and angry. But there is hope that something positive has to come out of all of this,” LeFevre said. That hope may stem from the current review committee organized by Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany. According to LeFevre, Hubbard appointed six people to look at the policies of the Albany diocese and report whether the policies are adequate. The committee is not confined to the clergy; there is outside involvement and that is always good, LeFevre said. *The Associated Press contributed to this story.*