

Bothell ex-pastor who alleges abuse is leaving the priesthood

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Friday, March 25, 2005

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2002219186_minder25m.html

The Rev. Lawrence Minder, who stunned his parishioners at Bothell's St. Brendan Church last year when he told them he was a victim of the Roman Catholic Church's sex-abuse scandal, is resigning from the priesthood.

Saying he has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder stemming from his abuse, Minder stated yesterday that counselors at an Arizona treatment facility told him recently he needed to separate from the priesthood to work through the issues underlying the disorder.

"It's been an internal conflict for the last three years to, in a sense, keep putting a best face on a situation that has no best face," he said.

On one hand, he felt a responsibility as pastor to "protect the fragile faith of the people" and to lead the parish through the larger sex-abuse scandal. At the same time, he was angry at "the scope (of the scandal) and lack of responsible leadership" of the bishops over the years.

Resigning from the priesthood, said Minder, who returned home from Arizona around Christmas, "is a step for my health and one that I was very reluctant to take. I love the priesthood, I love the church. It's a very meaningful way to live."

At the same time, he feels free now to "speak more honestly and openly about the institutional denial of this issue, which still continues."

Minder, who was in the news earlier last year for his controversial decision to invite a homeless encampment onto St. Brendan church grounds, told his congregation last August that he had been sexually abused and was resigning as pastor. He said at the time that he was doing so rather than undergo a psychological assessment, the results of which would have been available to Seattle Archbishop Alexander Brunett. Brunett had asked for the assessment over concerns about Minder's alcohol use.

Minder said yesterday that except for a few minor relapses, he has abstained from alcohol since 1992. He said he thought the archbishop was focusing on his alcohol use rather than on what Minder believes is the real issue: his abuse as a teenager by an older seminarian who later became a priest. "To me, that seemed like wanting to treat the symptoms and not the real problem."

Brunett, Minder said, has been generally supportive and is "really, sincerely trying. He just may not have the skills to do that effectively. I think it's representative of where many of the bishops are right now."

Seattle Archdiocese spokesman Greg Magnoni confirmed that the archdiocese received Minder's request for resignation but declined to comment further. Formally resigning from the priesthood — called voluntarily laicization — could take years and requires Vatican approval.

But "I consider myself done," said Minder, 44, who intends to look for a job and write a book about his experience. He hopes to split his time between Seattle and Arizona, where, he says, he fell in love with the weather.

"We miss Father Minder, and he had a wonderful impact on the parish while he was there, but we also know we have to move on without him," said David Livingston, who serves on St. Brendan's parish council.

In the three years since the scandal broke, nearly every diocese in the nation has been named in lawsuits, and three have declared bankruptcy. While the vast majority of accusers have been lay people, several priests have said they, too, were abused when they were young by other priests.

For instance, the Rev. Patrick O'Donnell, a former Spokane Diocese priest and the subject of dozens of abuse allegations, has stated in court documents that when he was a seminarian he was abused by a priest, who later was forced out of the ministry for sexual misconduct.

But few priests have spoken openly about it.

Minder said he was abused at about age 15, when he was a student at St. Edward Seminary in Kenmore. He said his abuser was the Rev. Richard Scully, who Minder believes was in his 30s at the time and who was in his last year at nearby St. Thomas Seminary. Both seminaries are now closed.

No one returned a call yesterday to what is believed to be Scully's residence in Lafayette, La.

From 1978 to the 1980s, Scully served in the Yakima Diocese. There, according to news reports at the time, he denied an allegation of abuse but was sent to a Catholic treatment center in New Mexico for sexual abuse of minors. He later served in the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas, where parishioners accused him of sexual misconduct. The diocese removed him from active ministry in March 2002.

Minder said Amarillo officials told him in 1993 that Scully would be retired from the ministry. When Minder learned from his twin brother, Kevin Minder, a priest in the Yakima Diocese, that had not happened, "that was part of the trauma, the betrayal," Lawrence Minder said. The Amarillo Diocese did not return calls for comment yesterday.

Deciding to leave the priesthood was not easy, Minder said. "I'm not sure I'll ever find anything that will provide that much meaning in my life. Yet I feel God's calling me to influence more lives by not being a priest."