

## Bishop: Abuse cases mishandled

By DARREN BARBEE, FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM, December 2, 2006

FORT WORTH -- In a sharp rebuke of his predecessor, Bishop Kevin Vann called the handling of sexual-abuse accusations against priests a "huge moral failure" and said he would have done things differently had he been leading the Fort Worth Roman Catholic Diocese then.

"The challenging thing for me is, all my life, I have always tried to respect my predecessor wherever I've been," Vann said. "But I can't defend the indefensible."

In an interview with the Star-Telegram on Friday, Vann and the Rev. Michael Olson, the vicar general, listed what they called specific mistakes made by Bishop Joseph P. Delaney and other priests. But Vann said he won't discipline four priests for their roles in dealing with information about accused priests, although he will talk to them about their responsibilities.

Vann and Olson also discussed two recent accusations against priests. They said the diocese removed an Arlington priest from Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church in August because of what they termed "sexual harassment" accusations involving two out-of-state women. Olson said that the case "does not involve criminal activity" and that it is being looked into by a private investigator hired by the diocese's attorney.

The diocesan officials would not identify another priest named in new abuse allegations forwarded to police in the past month. But they said the complaint involves one of eight priests previously accused of abuse.

Those priests are the Revs. William Hoover, John Howlett, James Reilly, James Hanlon, Philip Magaldi, Rudolf Rentería, Joseph Tu Ngoc Nguyen and Thomas Teczar. Hoover, Reilly and Hanlon are dead.

Olson, who notified police, said investigators "asked us not to say anything until it's complete."

David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, said Vann's frank criticism may help victims who have long suffered because of their abuse and "learned to expect so little from church officials in the short term."

"But we owe it our children not to be distracted or mollified with carefully crafted PR messages," Clohessy said.

Secret diocese files released this week by a state district judge show that Delaney and other former leaders, including the Rev. Robert Wilson, the former chancellor, misled people about the extent of the abuse. There is no evidence that police were notified of the allegations, which include rape and molestation of children as young as 5.

Seated next to Olson at the Catholic Center, Vann spoke about several abuse cases described in the files. Those incidents, they said, reflect deceptions, poor judgments and missteps.

Magaldi was accused of paying a boy and a young man to give him enemas and of raping the boy. Vann said Magaldi should have been immediately removed when the first allegation came to light in 1997. Magaldi has denied the allegations. Magaldi, who was serving at St. John the Apostle Catholic Church in North Richland Hills, was placed under the supervision of another priest instead of being removed.

Delaney, fearful of bad publicity, took action in 1999 after the second allegation.

Vann said Delaney should not have brought Magaldi to work in the Fort Worth diocese. Before moving to Fort Worth, Magaldi had been accused of perjury in New England and served time in a halfway house for embezzling \$123,400 from his Rhode Island parish. "He should never have been accepted here," Vann said. Delaney should have sought to have Magaldi defrocked, Vann said. Vann has taken steps to remove Magaldi and Rentería from the priesthood.

Magaldi is in an assisted-living center in North Richland Hills. In August, Vann forbade Magaldi to celebrate Mass. On Thursday, Vann visited Magaldi and said he was satisfied after talking with Magaldi and home administrators that the priest had not performed religious services, despite published reports to the contrary.

Olson said the diocese will periodically check on Magaldi to ensure that he is not defying Vann's order.

Olson also criticized the way Delaney handled Hoover, who was accused of sexually abusing several boys. Olson said Delaney was wrong to tell people in 1995 that Hoover admitted to molesting one boy when the priest had already told Delaney that three boys had been involved.

At the time, Delaney told the Star-Telegram, "When a complaint of this nature is found to be true, the care of the Catholic community requires that a full disclosure be made."

Said Olson: "That was wrong. He [Delaney] should have been more upfront. I don't want to blame this man, and I don't want to make excuses for him.

"But speaking in the objective order, it was wrong not to say there were more victims, for the sake of transparency and given the principles he had espoused."

Eventually, at least nine boys accused Hoover of abusing them.

Olson also criticized how one of Reilly's accusers was treated by the previous diocesan leadership.

In 1998, a man told Wilson that Reilly had fondled him when he was 11, according to the files.

Wilson told the man of a similar accusation by an adult but also said that church officials knew of "no other similar incidents with minors."

Wilson's notes in the file add that at the time, he had forgotten about a previous complaint against Reilly involving a minor.

Delaney should have ordered Wilson to contact "those who were misled when he forgot, as the files claim," Olson said.

Asked whether he agreed with Olson's statements, Vann said, "I put my name on what he said."

Asked what he would have said to Delaney, had he been in Fort Worth then, Vann answered: "If it were me, I would have withdrawn their faculties, suspended them ... sent their cases to Rome. And notified the authorities. ..."

Vann said that since he has been leader, he has taken swift action, even when an allegation does not involve a minor.

In the case of the priest at Vietnamese Martyrs, Vann and Olson said, a letter was read at Masses telling parishioners of the sexual harassment investigation. The allegations involve some form of touching, Olson said.

Church officials have asked anyone with allegations against that priest to come forward.

Vann said no one has, adding that he will personally visit the church this month.

Vann and Olson also said they will talk to -- but not discipline -- the Rev. Tim Thompson of St. John the Apostle Catholic Church in North Richland Hills and the Rev. John Gremmels of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Keller for the way they reported information about Magaldi.

Thompson and Gremmels both told Delaney about suspicious or unusual behavior involving Magaldi with children or teenagers but didn't report the information to police.

On Thursday, SNAP demanded that Vann take action against them, as well as Wilson and the Rev. Philip McNamara, for what the group believes was an improper response given what the four knew about accused priests.

In January 2001, Gremmels reported four incidents to Delaney concerning Magaldi, including seeing Magaldi kiss a grieving 17-year-old boy on both cheeks and give him a lengthy embrace. Gremmels said Thursday he considered the behavior repugnant, not criminal.

Olson said he does not believe the incidents should have been reported to police.

Thompson learned third-hand of possible "pedophilic material" on Magaldi's personal computer and informed Delaney in October 2001.

Olson said police should have been contacted in that case.

Vann said he will remind Gremmels and Thompson of their duty to report.

Clohessy said the two priests have long had an opportunity to call police but never did.

"And Vann, apparently, thinks that's OK," he said.

Olson added that, in looking at the files, he sees Delaney struggling between faith and fear.

He spoke with Delaney about three months before his death last year.

Delaney told him he was worried that the abuse would become part of his legacy. He said he felt bad about the pain so many people had suffered because of clerical abuse, Olson said.

"I think now, unfortunately, Bishop Delaney never apologized for the way he handled those things," Olson said. "It's fallen to us, in a sense, to heal and to do what we can to heal -- specifically for these misdeeds, and I would say bad judgments in handling them."