

Priest leaves parish after allegations

Former students say they were abused in early 1970s

By Jill Jasuta
Catholic Review staff

Father A. Joseph Maskell, pastor of St. Augustine's parish in Elkridge, voluntarily left the parish last weekend as allegations of sexual abuse resurfaced.

Former Archbishop Keough High School students allege that Father Maskell sexually abused them when he was chaplain and counselor at the southwest Baltimore Catholic school in the early 1970s.

Father Maskell, who denies all of the allegations, is now at a residential treatment center because of "anxiety and stress" over the prospect of civil litigation and a criminal investigation, according to a statement from the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

The statement was read to St. Augustine parishioners during a meeting after Masses July 31.

Allegations against Father Maskell, 55, first surfaced in 1992 when a woman claimed the priest sexually abused her while she was a student at Archbishop Keough High School. Father Maskell was the chaplain there 1969-75.

The high school has since merged with Seton High School.

The archdiocese investigated that allegation, according to archdiocesan spokesman William Blaul, but found no corroboration.

"Those first allegations could not be corroborated after extensive investigation," he said. "We were very thorough. We followed policies and procedures precisely."

Although he could not offer a specific number, Mr. Blaul said the archdiocese interviewed "more than several" people at the time of the initial allegations, including teachers, students, friends and acquaintances.

Father Maskell spent five months at a psychiatric hospital in Connecticut until April 1993. Mr. Blaul said the treatment center's conclusion was "no evidence of pathology."

Archdiocesan statement on Father Maskell

The following is the Archdiocese of Baltimore's statement about Father Joseph Maskell:

Within the last several weeks, Father Maskell was presented with allegations that he had engaged in inappropriate sexual contact with several former students of Archbishop Keough High School more than 20 years ago. Father Maskell denied the allegations. Father Maskell also denied sexual abuse allegations received by the Archdiocese and presented to Father Maskell approximately two years ago. The earlier allegations also related to alleged events from more than 20 years ago. The Archdiocese investigated the earlier allegations by interviewing former faculty members and certain former students who generally matched a description given by the alleged victim. The allegations were not corroborated.

Due to pressures brought to bear on Father Maskell because of the prospect of civil litigation and a criminal investigation, Father Maskell has sought residential psychological treatment for anxiety and stress. In Father Maskell's absence, the Archbishop will appoint a temporary administrator for St. Augustine Church.

He was named pastor of St. Augustine's in August 1993.

Since the first allegation surfaced in 1992, "dozens" of other alleged victims have come forward, according to Beverly A. Wallace, one of three attorneys representing them. Ms. Wallace said a civil suit could be filed by the end of the month, but she declined to name potential defendants.

For now, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is continuing conversations with attorneys representing the alleged victims. "We have been quite thorough in our attempts to communicate with the attorneys," Mr. Blaul said.

He also said the archdiocese "is not privy to all the information available. We've asked the attorneys representing the alleged victims to share all information... but many times we don't learn of information until it is published."

Ms. Wallace said she and the other attorneys representing the alleged victims have provided the archdiocese "with what they've requested. We've provided them with two witnesses. We've outlined for them the vast portion of what we have."

Mr. Blaul said the archdiocese is cooperating with a separate criminal investigation being conducted by the Baltimore states' attorney's office. No criminal charges have been placed against the priest.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Wil-

liam H. Keeler was expected to assign a temporary administrator to St. Augustine's this week. A parish volunteer there said: "We're holding up fine."

Father Maskell grew up in St. Katharine of Siena parish (now closed). His family later moved to St. Dominic's parish. He attended Calvert Hall, St. Charles College and St. Mary's Seminary.

Since his ordination in 1965, Father Maskell served as associate pastor at Sacred Heart of Mary, Graceland Park; St. Clement, Lansdowne; Our Lady of Victory, Arbutus; and Annunciation parishes. His first pastorate was at Holy Cross parish in south Baltimore.

Mr. Blaul emphasized that the Archdiocese of Baltimore takes all allegations seriously. "If anyone at anytime has any information regarding allegations of sexual abuse regarding anybody connected with this archdiocese, we encourage the reporting of allegations as quickly as possible to the state's attorney's office for criminal investigation and to the archdiocese so we may take appropriate personnel action."

Mr. Blaul said the following three archdiocesan officials will field inquiries or concerns on the Father Maskell case:

Monsignor Francis Malooly:

547-5446

Sheila Kelly: 547-5425

Ron Valenti: 547-5384