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## Former priest accused of abuse

*Geri Nikolai and Edith C. Webster*

*Staff*

*RRS;Metro*

St. Anthony of Padua parishioners hear that the alleged incident involving the Rev. Ted Feely happened 30 years ago.

By GERI NIKOLAI

and EDITH C. WEBSTER

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ROCKFORD - Members of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church here were told Sunday that a former priest may have sexually abused boys 30 years ago.

The Rev. Luke Poczworowski informed parishioners at weekend Masses that two men have made claims of abuse by the Rev. Ted Feely, who was at St. Anthony from 1968 to 1972. Both men were minors at the time of the alleged abuse.

Feely, a Franciscan priest, went to California in 1972 and was there until his death in 1991.

In contrast to how the Catholic Church once handled misconduct cases, Poczworowski revealed the name of the alleged abuser and invited any other victims of abuse to come forward. Poczworowski said the Franciscans are committed to helping victims of sexual abuse "obtain the emotional and spiritual support they need to recover."

St. Anthony faithful made it clear they appreciated the new openness of the church. Poczworowski was applauded after he spoke during services.

"Father Luke got a very good response," parish council President Gene Czerniewski said. "It took a lot of guts to stand up there and say that something like this might have happened. People were shocked at first."

Parishioner Valeri DeCastris missed the weekend services but also praised how the matter was handled.

"It's essential and absolutely appropriate that he is handling this openly and candidly," she said of the parish priest.

"I wanted to be proactive," Poczworowski said. "I have always been upfront with my parishioners, and I don't want that to change."

Poczworowski said he conferred with Bishop Thomas Doran of the Rockford Diocese and his parish council before going public with the news.

In a follow-up letter to church members, Poczworowski asked anyone who has been victimized by a Franciscan to call the order's regional headquarters in Chicago at

800-230-5774. He told parishioners some of them may be able to help by providing information to Franciscan investigators.

Feely served at St. Anthony at the time it was operated by the Franciscan Friars of the Province of St. Bonaventure, Chicago. Because of that, the Rockford diocese is not involved in the inquiry or any follow-up, diocesan spokesman Owen Phelps said.

St. Anthony property now is part of the diocese. The parish still is staffed by the Franciscans. But the bishop must concur with their appointment, and the Franciscan priest follows the bishop's orders while serving in the parish.

Some St. Anthony parishioners found the allegations difficult to believe. Parish trustee Carlo Rossi remembers Father Ted, as parishioners called Feely.

"Several people who knew him very well said that they were surprised that this might have happened," Rossi said. "We're hopeful that the outcome of the investigation is favorable."

The men accusing Feely went to the Franciscan order with their stories in the past month, Poczworowski said.

"After much soul-searching, the friars decided we should disclose the name of the priest involved," Poczworowski wrote in his parish letter. "These are the first reports of misconduct the order has ever received about Father Ted. ... But because this is such a grave matter, we decided to disclose the name and dates of service in the order to prompt memories and protect parishioners from needless anxiety."

The Catholic Church, under fire from coast to coast in the past six months because of how it handled sexual abuse by priests, pledged at a conference of American bishops two weeks ago to be more open about misconduct by priests. Bishops also said they will remove any priest who committed even one act of abuse and will refer all allegations to police.

In another local case, Harlan Clapsaddle was relieved of his parish duties at a Dixon church in 1997 after three brothers accused him of sexually abusing them when they were children. Neither church members in Dixon nor other places where Clapsaddle had served were told why he was removed.

Clapsaddle received some treatment and then was assigned to Cor Mariae Center nursing home where he said Mass and ministered to the sick until the brothers went public with the allegations this spring. Clapsaddle then left the nursing home, and Bishop Doran said he never again would serve in any capacity in the diocese.

Contact:gnikolai@smtp.register startower.com 815-987-1337

Contact:ewebster@smtp.register startower.com 815-987-1394

Photo

Luke Poczworowski