

In wake of sex abuse scandals, priests to host Latin Mass

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 21, 2011 NCR Today

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- With many questioning the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese over allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy, and subsequent inaction by diocesan officials, several priests here are planning something they hope will "promote unity" among the faithful: A special Latin-language "Solemn High Mass."

The Mass, to be held June 29 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church here, is to be celebrated in the "Extraordinary Form," or according to the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal, which typically includes prayers in Latin and the priest facing towards the altar during the celebration.

News of the Mass comes as the Kansas City diocese has been rocked by three cases of allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy in recent weeks.

One priest was arrested on charges of possession of child pornography May 19, but the diocese had waited five months before taking evidence to the police. Another pastor was removed from ministry June 3 over allegations of sexual abuse of minors dating back to the 1970s and '80s. It came to light June 9 that a man had accused the diocesan vicar general of sexual misconduct four years ago over an incident that had occurred in 1984.

Acknowledging the "discord and disunity during this present darkness," organizers of the Mass write that they want to "promote unity, which is borne of a common history or tradition -- hence why we have opted for a Solemn High (Traditional) Mass."

Announcement of the Mass came via an e-mail letter from the diocesan worship office yesterday.

"How glorious will it be to see those of your fold theretofore unacquainted...kneeling next to one another in the pews!" exhorts the letter. "Amidst all the discord and disunity during this present darkness, let there be light!"

Organizers say EWTN may shoot footage of the Mass for broadcast, which will be offered for the intentions of Bishop Robert Finn and for "unity among his flock."

Fr. Shawn Ratigan, a local pastor whose computer was found to contain child pornography in December, was moved to a religious sisters' community in January. He lived there for five months before his May 19 arrest.

Another local pastor, Fr. Michael Tierney, was removed from active ministry June 2. Tierney had been accused of misconduct earlier, and a lawsuit alleging abuse was filed against him in 2010. The diocese review board had found the earlier allegation not credible. But in May the board met with one person whose allegations they did find credible and also received information from two other individuals making accusations against Tierney.

"Fr. Tierney continues to deny these allegations," the diocese said in a statement June 2.

Finn received a letter accusing Msgr. Robert Murphy, the vicar general, of sexual misconduct four years ago, *The Kansas City Star* reported June 9. As vicar general, Murphy received cases of allegations of sex abuse by church workers and made recommendations about how to handle the cases, including which cases to send to the

review board.

Ratigan, 45, who is being held on \$200,000 bond, has pleaded not guilty. He made a brief court appearance June 16. The case was continued to July 21.

Ratigan's computer was first found to have images of child pornography in December.

The principal of the elementary school attached to the parish where Ratigan served also wrote a letter a year ago, addressed to Murphy, detailing concerns teachers and parents had about Ratigan's interactions with children.

In a press conference May 27, Finn told reporters that Murphy briefed him about principal Julie Hess? May 19, 2010, letter at the time but that Finn himself had not read it.

Brian Heydon, a local licensed professional counselor, wrote a letter to Finn in 2007 alleging that Murphy had propositioned him for sex in 1984 after the two had met to discuss a possible vocation the priesthood.

In a May 4, 2007 letter responding to Heydon, Finn wrote that while the accusation "has given rise to serious discussions and considerations," it "does not square with others' life-long knowledge of this priest."

"As troubling as these accusations are, I cannot conclude that they are compelling in their most serious claims," wrote Finn in his letter.

The full text of the letter inviting members of the diocese to the June 29 Mass follows:

The Holy Mass is being celebrated principally to give much glory to God through the ancient and sacred liturgy that is the Extraordinary Form, with all beauty and reverence. But it is also purposed to promote unity, which is borne of a common history or tradition - hence why we have opted for a Solemn High (Traditional) Mass.

So whether one identifies as a "charismatic" or a "traditionalist" or something in between, we can all appreciate that which has been celebrated by the Catholic Church for hundreds of years. How glorious will it be to see those of your fold theretofore unacquainted, alas even divided by the aforesaid labels, kneeling next to one another in the pews! Amidst all the discord and disunity during this present darkness, let there be light!

Toward this end, we have quite intentionally arranged for three priests of somewhat disparate callings to unite in the celebration of this Holy Mass. Specifically, Canon William Avis of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest will celebrate the Mass, assisted by Fr. John Fongemie of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (deacon) and Fr. Evan Harkins of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph (subdeacon). Deacon Wehner, Director of Sacred Liturgy for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, will serve as Master of Ceremonies. Seeing these priests come together for a common end - namely, the greater glory of God - will do more for unification of the flock than a myriad private prayers.

I really hope you can help me in publicizing this event. Because this Mass is being offered for the intentions of Bishop Finn and for unity among his flock, and because footage of the Mass is potentially to be acquired by EWTN, we are really hoping for a full house.

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