

Statement on Diocese of Richmond List of Priests Accused of Sexual Abuse

From Abbot Placid

It is with profound sadness that I have to communicate to you information connected with the issue of clergy sexual abuse in the Church. I was in Richmond last week and, in cooperation with the Diocese of Richmond, two names of former monks of Belmont Abbey with credible accusations were released, one by the diocese and one by me. I now wish to share this information with our Belmont Abbey College Community. Each allegation was handled according to the policies at the time the abuse was reported.

Be assured that, in neither case did the alleged abuse occur at Belmont Abbey, nor did it involve students of Belmont Abbey College. I can assure you furthermore that there are no allegations of any kind against the current members of the Belmont Abbey monastic community. I am engaging the service of an independent private investigator to audit the personal files of the monks to provide an assurance of independent verification that there are no other credible allegations against current or former monks of this community.

This past Wednesday, February 13, the Diocese of Richmond released the names of diocesan and religious priests who had credible and substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors. The list included the name of a former monk of Belmont Abbey, Frederick George. In addition, after consultation with the prior and headmaster of the abbey and school in Richmond, I made the decision to make known the existence of a credible allegation against another former monk of Belmont Abbey, Donald Scales, who had been a member of the Richmond community since 1980. That information was communicated to the parents and alumni of the high school, to Bishop Knestout of Richmond, and to the pastor of St. Benedict's Parish in Richmond. As a result, Father Donald's name is now also on the list of the Richmond Diocese. I chose to release Father Donald's name because I was aware that this allegation had been communicated by the Diocese of Charlotte to the Richmond abbey in 2006, but evidently had not been disclosed to the diocese. Not to have disclosed this information now would have been a continuation of the cover-ups that have increased the pain of victims and compromised the credibility and mission of the church. If we are to end the crisis of clerical sexual abuse, we must have transparent and honest communication regarding allegations of sexual abuse.

The allegations against these monks come from a single individual in each respective case. The alleged incidents took place in the late 1970s, but were reported only at a later time. The alleged incident with Frederick George took place in parish ministry in the Diocese of Richmond; the alleged incident with Donald Scales took place during pastoral ministry in North Carolina.

Frederick George was assigned to St. Benedict Priory in Richmond, VA, from 1975-1987, after serving for six months as a deacon at St. Michael's Parish in Gastonia. In Richmond he served as parochial vicar and pastor at St. Benedict Church and taught religion at Benedictine High School. In November 1987, the Diocese of Richmond was contacted by parents who alleged that Frederick George had abused their son at St. Benedict Parish in the late 1970s. He was removed as pastor of St. Benedict's and left residence at the monastery. He was briefly assigned by the bishop to other pastoral ministry in the diocese and removed himself in 1988 from ministry and religious life for several years. In 1991, he returned to Belmont Abbey. He received certification

as a hospital chaplain and served from 1992-94 as a hospital chaplain. As was a usual practice at the time – very different from the current policy – he received two separate comprehensive psychological evaluations and two letters of suitability from two different psychologists. He was appointed chaplain at Belmont Abbey College from 1994-97. Frederick George left residence at Belmont Abbey and priestly ministry in July 1998 in order to care for his ailing mother. He was dismissed by the Holy See permanently from the monastic community and from priestly ministry in 2004.

Donald Scales entered Belmont Abbey in 1948. Except for assignments to Richmond in 1955-57, 1960-61, 1970-71, and a leave of absence from 1971-75 to serve as a drug and alcohol counselor, he served in various positions at Belmont Abbey College and in pastoral work in North Carolina. In 1980 he transferred to St. Benedict Priory in Richmond, VA, and stayed with that community when it became independent of Belmont Abbey in 1989. In 2006 I received an allegation of sexual abuse by Donald Scales while he was serving at St. Michael's Parish in Gastonia. I sent the allegation to the Diocese of Charlotte and informed the superior of the monastery in Richmond of the allegation. Notice of the allegation was also sent at that time to the office of Child Protective Services of the Department of Social Services in Gaston County. The lay review board of the Diocese of Charlotte, after investigation, judged the allegation credible. This information was communicated to the superior of the monastery in Richmond by Bishop Peter Jugis. Donald Scales was at that time elderly and infirm and no longer in pastoral ministry. Father Donald denied the allegation. He died in 2008.

It is painful to have to communicate this information to you. However, clerical sexual abuse has caused grave damage to victims, has damaged the church and its mission, and is a source of shame to all of us who seek to live and minister with integrity. While we cannot undo actions and decisions of the past, we are deeply contrite that former monks of our community have credible allegations of harm to others. The monks of Belmont Abbey are committed to proper screening and formation of candidates for monastic life in our community, and to transparent and honest communication of allegations of sexual abuse in keeping with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People of the national bishops' conference. We continue to pray for all who have been harmed by the evil of clerical sexual abuse, and are committed to moving forward with integrity in our service to the church and our college community.

If you wish to contact me, I can be reached at: placidosp@bac.edu.