

Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth
For Immediate Release
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Credible 1978 Sexual Abuse of Minor by Deceased Priest Is Investigated by Fort Worth Catholic Diocese

Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth Bishop Kevin Vann announced Monday that the diocese has received a credible accusation of a sexual abuse of a minor which occurred in 1978 by a priest, now deceased, who served at the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church in Decatur.

The credible accusation alleges that in 1978 Father Francis A. Zimmerer, a member of the Benedictine Order based in Subiaco, Ark., abused an 11-year-old male member of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, located at 1305 Deer Park Rd. in Decatur. The victim is now 42-years-old and lives out of state. The diocese has offered the victim counseling

The Very Rev. E. James Hart, Chancellor and Moderator of the Curia of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, said the diocese was contacted on August 25, 2008 by the spouse of the victim. A subsequent review confirmed that the allegation was credible.

Father Hart said the allegation has been referred to the diocesan Conduct Review Board and to the Decatur Police Department.

Diocesan representatives reported the credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by Father Zimmerer to members of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church on Sunday and invited any other potential victims in the parish to contact the diocese.

The late Father Zimmerer was a religious order priest working in the Fort Worth diocese and was assigned as administrator of the parish at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in January 1975 by the first Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, John J. Cassata, and served until May, 1981. Father Zimmerer returned to the Benedictine Order's Subiaco Abbey after leaving Decatur and died in January 1983. Prior to the Decatur assignment, Father Zimmerer worked in the Catholic Diocese of Dallas when Fort Worth was part of the Dallas diocese.

The diocese's Safe Environment Program requires a safe environment for children and youth. Likewise, Article 12 of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," requires that dioceses establish "safe environment" programs and gives the necessary elements of such a program.

The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth encourages anyone who has suffered sexual abuse by a priest or anyone who serves the church to contact Victim Abuse Coordinator Judy Locke at (817) 560-2452, Ext. 201 or Father Hart at (817) 560-2452, Ext. 104.