

**CHURCH ISSUES APOLOGY... 03-06-95**

Asheville Citizen-Times

Published: 03-06-95

Section: Local

Page: 1A

**Keywords:** Priest, Sexual Abuse, Crime, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, Roman Catholic  
**Correction Date:****CHURCH ISSUES APOLOGY****Byline:** By Tim Reid STAFF WRITER

Stunned members of St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church were told Sunday that one of the church's most revered pastors sexually abused children of the parish in the 1950s.

The Rev. William Kuder, who was the West Asheville church's pastor from 1949 until his death in 1960, used the cover of the priesthood to prey on innocent children, said Bishop William G. Curlin of the Catholic Diocese of Charlotte.

"The purpose of my visit today is to apologize to the members of St. Joan of Arc Parish and to all former members for the hurt caused by the reprehensible behavior of Father Kuder," Curlin said at the church's weekend Masses. "We know that there are today middle-aged men who once were the victims of Father Kuder during the years they were approaching puberty."

Curlin said he learned of Kuder's actions from a victim who harbored the secret for many years before coming forward. Curlin visited with and counseled the man and came away convinced that his story is true.

"He really is a wonderful Christian man. I have talked with him a number of times and consider him my friend," Curlin said. "He said he has talked with three others who were also abused by Father Kuder."

"Some may ask, 'Why bring this up now, after so many years following Father Kuder's death? What good can be accomplished by such a revelation?'" Curlin said.

"Let me assure you that the victims of Father Kuder and their families have never ceased to feel the intense pain he brought them. Their Calvary has lasted a lifetime and continues to this day."

The bishop said his intent was not to play up what happened 40 years ago but to create an atmosphere where people who are hurting from any kind of abuse will seek help. Two trained counselors, one of them a nun, stayed after church services to talk with those affected by the bishop's talk.

The problem of child sexual abuse is not peculiar to the priesthood but occurs throughout society, Curlin said.

Eighty-five percent of people who abuse children are parents of the victims, he said. "This is a sickness in our society."

Many victims of child abuse feel guilty and try to live with the horrible secret, Curlin said.

"For those who were victims of Father Kuder, I assure you that you were innocent of all sin," he said. "You were a child who was abused and molested by a man who hid behind his priesthood and took advantage of it to use you for his personal pleasure."

The vast majority of priests who dedicate their lives to helping people inevitably suffer from the deeds of someone like Father Kuder, Curlin said.

"A lot of good priests are hurting today," he said.

Curlin emphasized the diocese's policy on sexual abuse of children, which states that any

allegation of sexual abuse against a priest will bring about his immediate removal from ministry pending an investigation.

A special committee has been set up to investigate any such reports. If any priest is found guilty of sexual abuse, there will be no second chance and he will be expelled from the priesthood, Curlin promised. Sunday's revelations focused on one of St. Joan of Arc's best-remembered priests. When church members remodeled a room for meetings and other functions last year, they designated it the Father Kuder Room with a plaque and picture in his memory.

"I noticed both of them had been removed recently and I wondered why. Now I know why," said a shocked church member after the bishop's talk Sunday.

Curlin said he chose to bring the painful news in person because he wanted to deliver a message.

"We want to publicly apologize and declare our determination that this will never happen again," Curlin said. "We as a Catholic community can allow no less than zero tolerance of this evil."

Bishop E. Joseph Gossman of the Catholic Diocese of Raleigh joined Curlin in issuing an apology for Kuder's actions, which occurred when the Diocese of Raleigh included the whole state.