

REV. RONALD VOSS

Excerpted from the Sunday, February 16, 1997 Indianapolis Star Faith Betrayed series: Sins of the fathers

■ **THE REV. RON VOSS**, 55, who resigned his ministry in 1993, was accused of sexually abusing eight male teen-agers. At least some abuses occurred at a family camp led by Voss in northern Delaware County. First accused in 1988, Voss received therapy and moved to Haiti. He quit the priesthood after his correspondence to camp families spurred concerns among some as to whether he posed a threat in Haiti. Those concerns prompted Vicar General Rev. Robert Sell to visit Voss, a trip that yielded Voss' resignation. In Haiti, Voss works for a program that matches parishes there with churches in the United States that contribute aid.



Excerpted from the Sunday, February 16, 1997 Indianapolis Star Faith Betrayed series: The Lafayette Diocese has been home and haven to men of God who shattered lives and walked away.

... One priest had sexual relations with a teen who went on to become a priest himself. After donning the collar, that victim also became a sexual predator, abusing male adolescents. His name: Ron Voss.

... Then there was Voss. During the 1970's and '80's, the priest led a family camp in rural Delaware County. The charismatic peace activist sang songs of hope and preached social justice, inspiring adult campers – and impressing their children.

Brazenly, with adults nearby, Voss invited teen-age boys to his tent or cabin. There, he engaged in “inappropriate touching and sexual manipulation,” says diocese Vicar General Rev. Robert Sell, who investigates sexual abuse and misconduct cases. While Sell insists those youths were between the ages of 16 and 18 – past the legal age of consent – other sources put some of the victims' ages at 14 and 15.

As a teen growing up in Anderson, Voss himself had sexual relations with a priest. Voss admitted that to several people, including the mother of one of his victims. Voss would not talk to *The Star* and *The News* about the teens he abused, but in a letter circulated to friends in 1993, he apologized for his “past inappropriate behavior” and for being “a source of great pain.”

... When it came time for Bishop Higi to choose his second-in-command, he named Segó.

While Higi said he was “flabbergasted” to learn in 1994 of Mitchell's charge that Segó was a molester, others are not sure what Higi knew and when he knew it. Priests in the diocese whisper that the bishop had to be naïve or blind not to suspect. They note that Higi and Segó were close friends for decades. They have lived together in the bishop's house and traveled together to Florida and Europe.

Abuser Voss also was a longtime friend of Higi's. They grew up in the same neighborhood in Anderson. Higi says Voss feels deep regret for his wrongdoing and has been rehabilitated. The bishop praises Voss as a “success story.”

When charges arose against Voss in the late 1980's, Higi did not consult his top aide, Segó.

A court document shows that Higi did not trust one friend's ability to hold his other friend's problems in confidence.

REV. RONALD VOSS

A silence broken

While the true human toll of abusive priests might never be known, the diocese acknowledged it helped pay for the therapy of up to 40 victims, a number officials later said could be as low as 20.

Voss alone had eight alleged victims, by the diocese's own count. It is unclear how many girls, teens or young women Segó abused.

... Jeanette Sears, a Catholic from Crawfordsville who knew Father Voss, thinks the church is unfairly criticized for doing too little about sexual abuse in years past when no one in society understood the problem.

Critics say, "The church should have stopped this. The church should have known," she says. But the church is a forgiving church. So, Sears says priests were forgiven and reassigned with the admonishment "Go, and sin no more."

... Voss is a respected figure in Haiti. In August, he was honored by a visit from Higi. The bishop spent time with the former priest who works with the needy, during a trip to the island to inspect church missions.

"He is doing magnificent work," Higi said. "It's amazing what the man has been able to do."

Some priests from the Lafayette Diocese returned from trips to Haiti months earlier with a different view.

They reported comments from Haitians that Voss still might be celebrating Mass and possibly even taking children home with him.

Their concerns drew a sharp written rebuke from the diocese last March. Sell, the vicar general, declared that Voss has stayed out of trouble and "kept constant vigilance over himself." Sell also said that since Voss resigned his ministry in 1993, he has not functioned as a priest and "directs individuals to cease from call him 'Father'."

Yet, in a 1994 national television appearance about violence in Haiti, a tanned and eloquent Voss was referred to as "Father Voss" and as a "priest from Indiana."

On CBS' *Eye to Eye With Connie Chung*, Voss spoke for his adopted strife-torn country. Shown strumming his guitar and singing with a group of Haitians, Voss was depicted as a man of conscience who lost a friend to the violence, and who "knows all about the reign of fear."

While sex abuser Voss addressed an audience of millions, the concerned priests in Indiana were silenced.

Citing a church canon that defends the honor priests, Sell ordered them to "cease from jeopardizing the name and reputation of Ron Voss."

Excerpted from the Sunday, February 16, 1997 Indianapolis Star Faith Betrayed series: Trusting young victims, all easy prey

"If you can't trust a priest," the suburban Indianapolis woman says, "who can you trust?"

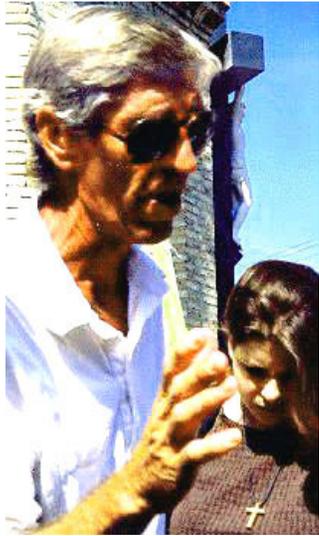
A central Indiana couple trusted Ron Voss. A cherished friend, the Rev. Voss called their young son "almost perfect." Then, when he had him off alone, Voss sexually abused him.

"Our son suffered," says the victim's mother.

REV. RONALD VOSS

“This guy betrayed him.”

Betrayal - it forever links those who put their trust in men of faith, only to discover that the priests' true creed was satisfying sexual cravings.



Those who fell prey to abusive priests of Lafayette Diocese tell stories of despair, anger, shame - and loss.

... For the Voss victim's parents, more than trust was broken. So were their hearts.

Their tormented son, who used drugs to numb the pain of his molestation, died tragically after he revealed his abuse.

Tragic cycle

The boy Father Voss called nearly perfect bore his dark secret into adulthood.

In a call home from college one night, he started releasing the pain.

“Mom,” he said, “I think I'm going insane - help me.”

Only years later did he finally confide to his mother what was wrong - that he had been molested by a Roman Catholic priest. He didn't name his abuser, though, and soon after died of a heart attack. It fell to his outraged father to learn the abuser's identity: “Ron Voss - son of a bitch.”

The victim's mother insisted on confronting Voss.

She recently recounted that conversation for a reporter.

At the meeting, she says, she read from a statement. It bespoke treachery and loss.

“You have no idea what it is to labor, to birth a human being - to give life,” she told Voss. “Beyond words!”

With her she had a photo and a pair of shoes. “This is all I have left of my son!” she cried.

The woman who says her boy was 13 or 14 when he was abused, blasted Voss with questions.

Voss began to speak.

Sickened, she cut him off.

The woman says the priest admitted molesting her son, but amazingly proclaimed he didn't know he “was doing anything wrong.”

“Do you know how sick it is to sexually take advantage of a young person?” she asked.

How do I live (with) this agony forever and forever?

And of her son's abuse; “Where were you, Ron - and how did you do it?”

Yes, Voss answered.

“And ... the priest said he loved me.”

Documented information shows Voss told others as well of his sexual relationship with a priest starting when Voss was 15 or 16.

Far from viewing himself as a victim, Voss has said the relationship was nurturing.

A diocese official who said he knew nothing of Voss' own victimization acknowledged Voss had been slow to grasp the full extent of the “boundaries” he violated with young people.

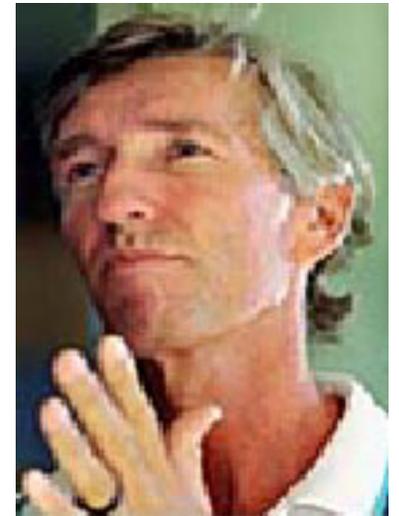
The victim's mother shudders at that mentality.

Still, she recalls that during her confrontation with Voss, the priest seemed drained, devastated.

At the end, he started to cry.

Exposed as an abuser, Voss said: “This is just so humiliating.”

The woman put her arms around him. Even though Voss had damaged her son, she still felt compassion. Ron “was like my son, like my brother ...” I said, “It is humiliating, look what you've done.”



Ron Voss

WEATHER

PARTLY CLOUDY

Mild. Low 20. High 41. Page E4

SPORTS

PACERS BLOW 4TH-QUARTER LEAD TO KNICKS

Indiana misses final 12 shots in 89-80 loss in New York. Page C1

SPORTS

INDIANA DEFEATS MICHIGAN IN OT 84-81

A.J. Guyton scores 31 points in road victory. Page C1

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

CITY FINAL

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty" II Cor. 3:17

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Staff Photo / D. Todd Moore

IN THEIR COURT: The fates of sexually abusive priests are in the hands of Bishop William Higi (left) and his vicar general, the Rev. Robert Sell. Basing their decisions largely on victims' ages, the men call their approach responsible. Detractors call it wrongheaded and risky.

THE BISHOP'S JUSTICE

In the Lafayette Diocese, priests who abuse are judged and a distinction critics find outrageous: were they victims, or children?

**By Linda Graham Caleca
and Richard D. Walton
STAFF WRITERS**

Priests accused of sexual abuse or misconduct in the Lafayette Diocese face neither judge nor a jury.

They answer to the bishop, and William L. Higi's system of justice is ill-defined, infuriating to victims – and, some fear, dangerously misguided.

Higi's law is based on a maze of church canons, state statutes and psychological theories still under wide debate.

Instead of prison, perpetrators go to therapy. What happens next may depend less on the trauma they inflicted than on their victims ages.

Molest a young child, Higi says, and you're finished as a priest.

But abuse a teen and there are options. With counseling, you may return to the ministry. In practice though, abusers have slipped out of town and begun new lives outside the priesthood.

Child molesters cannot be cured, Higi explains, but men who prey on teens can.

His second-in-command takes that belief a surprising step further.

Some teens, Vicar General Rev. Robert Sell suggests, might be partly responsible for their own abuse. Unlike “innocent” children, he says, teens can “consent” to sexual acts.

As young as 13, says Sell, who investigates the diocese’s abuse cases, there can be an “element of consent, as well as an element of understanding of what is morally right and wrong.”

The bishop doesn’t go that far. He dismisses as irrelevant the idea of consenting teens. Yet Higi calls it “consenting” when priest have sex with young adults – even parishioners. He lets those priests return to the pulpit after therapy.

*With teens as young as 13, there can be
“an element of consent, as well as an element of
understanding what is morally right and wrong.”
- Rev. Robert Sell*

Critics call this system of discipline offensive and wrongheaded.

It misses the larger point – that priests have promised to refrain from sexual relationships all together, says the Rev. Melvin Bennett of St. Bernard Church in Crawfordsville.

Instead of worrying about the victims’ ages, Bennett says, church officials should be talking to priest about “living a celibate life and living a chaste life.

“And being men of prayer.”

If the diocese’s approach is misguided, it is also convenient.

While no one suggests that Higi and Sell devised this system for expediency, it does allow them to case a terrible problem in the best light.

In a Roman Catholic diocese long plagued by accusations of sexual abuse and misconduct, only a fraction of the accused preyed on young children; more abused teens. So Higi and Sell can downplay the bulk of the offenses and truthfully tell the public their pedophiles are few. The diocese can justify its more lenient treatment of abusers of teens because those offenders are not, as Sells puts it, “the extreme predator” a pedophile is.

Consider the cases of Monsignor Arthur Sego and the Rev. Ron Voss – both long time friends of the bishop.

Sego, who sexually abused girls, lived a restricted life in a rest home on Higi’s orders. He cannot come and go without supervision.

In contrast, Voss, who was accused of abusing eight male teenagers, is a free man in Haiti. He resigned the priesthood in 1993.

“The man just doesn’t understand (sexual) boundaries,” Higi says of abusers such as Voss. “There are many people in this country who engage in this ... older people that get involved with younger people,”

Infuriating distinction

Angry victims say comments like that minimize the pain caused by Voss and other predators of vulnerable teens. They say these abuses were no less horrific – and the predators no less guilty.

A grief-stricken mother, who says her son was victimized by Voss at age 13 or 14, can hardly believe that Higi draws a line between children and adolescents.

She says her son died a traumatized young man after Voss sexually abused him years earlier.

That central Indiana woman asked that her name not be used, but wanted the bishop to remember that Voss did a terrible thing.

He hurt children, she reminds Higi. “It’s child molest.”

Under Indiana law, the age of consent is 16. Sexual acts with children under 14 are felonies, whether the victim is willing or not.

Yet priests who ignore those laws went not to court, but to Higi. Diocese officials insist they followed the law by reporting child abuse to authorities. That could not be confirmed because those reports are confidential. But no criminal prosecutions are known to have resulted.

In place of the legal system, the church becomes the law. Higi insists that he acts promptly and responsibly.

He stresses that any priest guilty of sex abuse or misconduct has committed a wrong. But he sees *degrees* of wrong and believes that any man who is not a dangerous pedophile stands a chance of rehabilitation.

This is how Higi and Sell explain it:

- Pedophiles, who prey on children under age 13, can never again function as priests. They suffer a severe and lasting psychological disorder.
- Ephebophiles, who are attracted to teen-agers, can learn to control those sexual urges with therapy. They may be allowed to return to some form of God’s work.

No abusers of teens currently are in the Lafayette Diocese. Only after rehabilitation, Sell says, could any return in the future.

Abusers, though, don’t always fall into a clear category.

The Rev. Ken Bohlinger says he hardly knew – or cared – whether the boys he sexually abused were 9, 10, 12, or 14.

Asks Bohlinger, a former Anderson priest: “Are you an alcoholic just for beer? Are you an alcoholic just for wine? Are you an alcoholic just for the hard stuff?”

“I’m attracted to children, period.”

Psychological debate

Higi did not pull his system of discipline out of thin air. He says it is rooted in psychological research and expert opinions.

One noted expert is the Rev. Canice Connors, the immediate past president of St. Luke Institute in Silver Springs, Md. Connor concedes that expert that talk about teen abusers can sound like they are trying to “excuse” the behavior. Far from it, he says, ephebophiles must be held accountable.

Still, Connor believes a pedophile is a “much sicker person.” Cures are rare, he says, for molesters who are obsessed with a child’s smooth skin, hairless body, and small genitals.

Those who abuse teens suffer from low self-esteem, Connor says. They just can’t believe that any adult would be interested in them. With therapy, many can learn to control their urges and, under supervision, return to some type of ministry.

Easier said than done, counters Ft. Wayne psychologist John Newbauer.

Normally, he said, men attracted to teens can be treated by helping them focus instead on healthy relationships with adults.

But for priests pledged to celibacy, Newbauer said, there is “nowhere to go with their sexual fantasies.”

Fr. Fred Berlin

Curing either abusers of children or teens is difficult, stresses Dr. Fred Berlin of Baltimore who sees little distinction between pedophiles and ephrophiles.

“I wouldn’t use the word cure with any of these people,” said Berlin of the National Institute for the Study, Prevention, and Treatment of Sexual Trauma. “Both are serious circumstances.”

Berlin urged church officials to remember that teens are very much like young children. Maturity levels do not always match ages, he says.

So it is wrong “to be debating the age of consent among children.”

As an advisor to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Berlin sees bishops struggling to understand these issues. He advises them to deal honestly with the community and to “err on the side of public safety.”

Higi calls the former priest a “success story of rehabilitation.”

Noting that Voss regularly sees a therapist, the bishop says that there is no reason to worry about Voss’ sexual behavior today.

Berlin worries anyway.

Voss comes in contact with young Haitians; he works with parishes and has also taught English.

A man with Voss’ history should “not be somewhere else where vulnerable youngsters can be victimized by him,” Berlin said.

“Kids are just as important in Haiti as they are in a hometown of Indiana.”

Salvation of souls

Muncie was the Rev. Raymond Wieber’s town.

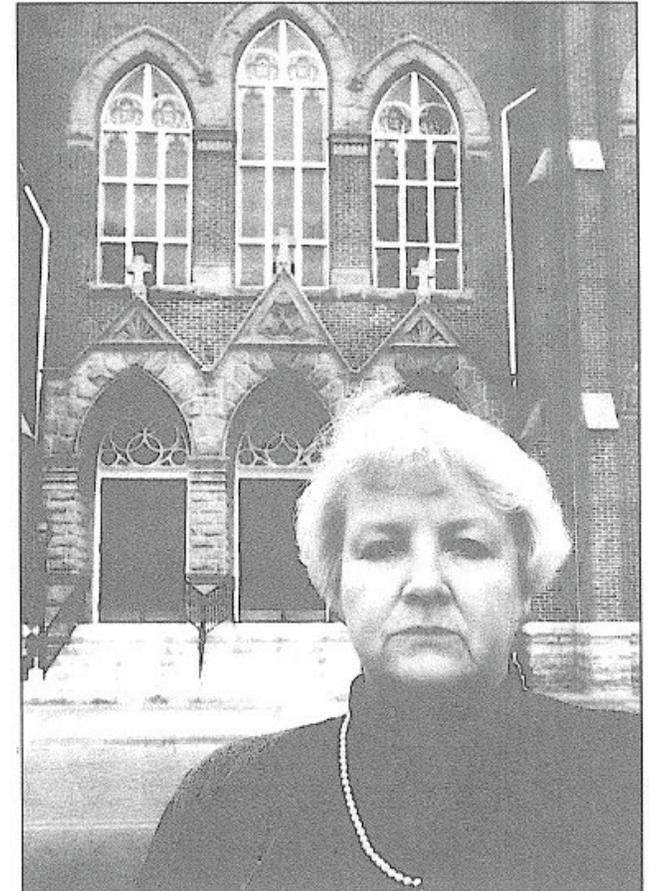
Even though Wieber, of St. Lawrence church, was accused of repeatedly abusing a teen-age altar boy. Vicar General Sell says the diocese considered bringing the priest back after his therapy.

“It was our hope that he would come back to some type of ministry,” says Sell.

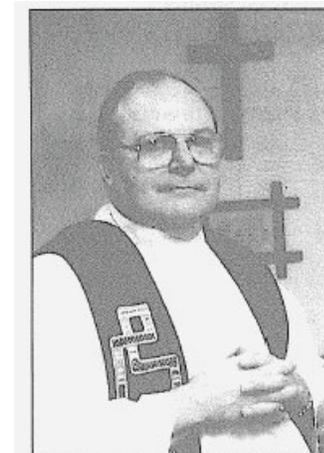
Sell, who was a friend of Wieber’s, notes that the “salvation of souls” is a supreme law of the church and an important goal in these cases.

He says Wieber might have been allowed to minister at a nursing or retirement home, a place teens didn’t frequent.

In 1993, before Wieber’s fate could be decided, the priest died of cancer.



Staff Photos / Susan Ploggonen



YEARS OF WORRY: Despite repeated complaints from Phyllis Marlowe (above) that the Rev. Raymond Wieber was abusing male teens, he remained at St. Lawrence Church in Muncie. Wieber finally was removed from the pulpit, and, in 1993, died of cancer.

VOICES of Conscience

CONCERNED PRIEST: The Rev. Melvin Bennett says Bishop William Higi misses the point in focusing on victims ages when deciding discipline for his priests. Bennett says Higi should demand that priests lead moral lives.

That officials even considered returning him to ministry outrages Phyllis Marlowe. A devout Catholic from Muncie, she says it's "just enough to make me quit the church."

For years, Marlowe suspected Wieber's abuses. She lived behind St. Lawrence and heard accounts of sexual acts from teens who visited Wieber's church or rectory. When she complained to Bishop Raymond Gallagher, he told her Wieber had been to therapy and no longer posed a problem.

Years later when Higi was bishop, Marlowe complained again, this time about Wieber's abusing the altar boy. She learned of the abuse long before Wieber preyed on the youth, who was one of 10 children in a family whose father had died. Marlowe, the mother's friend, said Wieber exploited the tragedy.

Higi immediately sent Wieber to therapy, but death ended his ministry.

"He was finally removed," says Marlowe, the Delaware County recorder. "God did it."

Although it was possible for priests who abuse teens to return to ministry under Higi's system, the fate of the child molesters is more certain. Their careers in the priesthood are finished, the diocese says.

Though Segó, like the others, escaped persecution and prison, he did receive some punishment from Higi.

At the rest home, Higi says, Segó is essentially under "house arrest." The bishop's voice flared with anger as he spoke of Segó, his former second-in-command.

"I think house arrest is a good term because it is very difficult for him to be where he is," Higi said. "He is not free to come at go at will."

In an interview, Segó said he had no idea why the bishop treated him more harshly than all the other accused priests. But he disputes that his home is a jail.

"I am in a very quite, beautiful rest home out in the woods," Segó said. "We are just out in the country ... and you can't see anywhere but up."

Segó is lonely, though, and wants to come home to his family in Indiana. But he depends on his church financially, and he must do as his bishop asks. At least for the time being, Segó says, Higi won't let him return.

Pedophiles, Higi says, will never be tolerated in the diocese. "Even one case of pedophilia," he said, holding a finger in the air, "is abhorrent to everything we stand for."

When asked for a breakdown of how many priests in his diocese abused children and how many abused teens, Higi refused to say, calling it privileged information.

Yet Higi clearly is frustrated that critics have "lumped this whole thing together and said that a tremendous percentage of Catholic clergy are pedophiles. It simply isn't true."

In the Lafayette Diocese, Segó has been identified as a pedophile. Yet he did not limit himself to children; he also admits to fondling young pregnant women. Bohlinger may or may not be a pedophile; he says he can't remember what his therapist told him about that. The ages of his young victims mattered little to Bohlinger, who no longer functions as a priest and says he has not abused anyone since 1986.

At least 3 other priests were accused by teenagers or mostly teens; they are Voss, Wieber, and the late Rev. Donald Tracey.

What is a “child?”

Church officials take great pains to distinguish a Segó from a Voss.

During interviews with *The Indianapolis Star* and *The Indianapolis News*, Sell repeatedly corrected reporters who used the words “children” or “minors” when talking about adolescent victims. The vicar general balked at answering questions until reporters used the word “teen-agers.”

So sharp is the line drawn that the panel set up by Higi to review sexual misconduct cases was created expressly to protect children. Accusations involving teens have not been routinely sent to the Diocesan Review Board, Sell says.

Sell explains that teens and young adults are of a “different mind-set.” They can “give consent” and understand the kind of “relationship” they are having.

In fact, he says, some teens are the sexual aggressors.

“The teenager might seek to act out in some fashion an expression of emotion or of attachment or of desire towards the minister,” Sell says. He adds that priests must gently stop those advances, but, “unfortunately, with the human condition, some of our priests did not.”

Sell adds that he’s not suggesting that any teen “has led a priest to stray.” It is the priest, he says, who has chosen to commit a wrong.

Asked when a child becomes a teen, Sell says about age 13. But when asked again to define a “minor,” Sell said the age can depend on the speed of puberty. For girls, he says, it can happen about age 12; for boys, about 14.

Yet the diocese’s own written protocols for handling sexual misconduct cases clearly defines a minor as anyone under 18.

If the system of deciding the fates of priests perpetrators seems confusing or inconsistent, Higi insists it is not. Yet he won’t explain, calling the details of his decisions confidential.

Higi won’t even specify what happened to each accused priest. In a scolding written response to questions from *The Star* and *The News* – questions sent to the bishop after he abruptly cut off interviews – he wrote that “whether they reassigned or were fired or were granted restricted retirement is basically irrelevant.”

He also wouldn’t elaborate on Sell’s reference to teens who “consent.” Higi wrote: “‘Consent’ as used in the context of your question is irrelevant.”

A matter of trust

Higi is neither a lawyer nor a psychologist, but in the north central diocese, his word is law. He has no superior in this country; his boss is Pope John Paul II in Rome.

The bishop wants the public to trust his judgment. He says, with emotion, that he is doing his “darnedest to address this thing.”

“How do you capture the pain of this thing?” The bishop asks. Pain turns to anger for some victims when they hear church officials misstating their ages, making them appear older than they were at the time of their abuse.

Sell, for example, puts the ages of Ron Voss’ victims at 16, 17 or 18. But the mother of the young man who died years after being molested by Voss insists her son was 13 or 14 when the abuse occurred. Other Voss victims were known to be 15.

“Are you an alcoholic just for beer? Are you an alcoholic just for wine? Are you an alcoholic just for the hard stuff? I’m attracted to children, period.”
-Rev. Ken Bolinger

Sego has insisted that accuser Linda Schrader was 17 when he had her undress and dance for him.

“No way, no!” Shouts Schrader, who says she was closer to 11 or 12 and “naive as naive can come.”

“I didn’t even say the word sex,” she says. “Didn’t read it, didn’t hear it, didn’t see it, didn’t know it.”

Anyone under 18 is clearly a child in the eyes of David Wilson, a social worker who runs the diocese’s victims’ assistance office in Kokomo. Wilson stresses that his office is not involved in investigating or disciplining accused priests. To him, it doesn’t make any difference whether victims are 5 or 15.

“They are all children,” says Wilson. “They are all hurting persons. And I am here to help them.” That’s the correct response, priests say.

Higi needs to worry about the victims – “who they are, where they are, what their problems are, if they need help,” said one priest who asked not to be identified. Are they “angry, bitter? What healing has taken place?”

Victims and accused priests alike deserve a fair and open process, says Father Bennett of Crawfordsville.

But Higi, he says, “is in absolute control of this issue and has been from the very beginning and will be for the foreseeable future. And this is at my own insistence.”

That, Bennett says, is part of the problem.

It clearly is, says Indianapolis attorney Robert Weddle, who has represented Sego victim Angela Mitchell in a failed lawsuit. Mitchell filed her claim after the statute of limitations ran out.

Cases go nowhere

Weddle is angry because he believes neither Higi nor the late Bishop Gallagher reported abuse cases to authorities. By law, suspicions of child abuse must be disclosed to Child Protective Services or to police.

The attorney says he canvassed seven central Indiana police departments, none of which had heard from the diocese. One officer, Weddle says, laughed at him for asking whether the church promptly reports child abuse.

Yet Higi, Sell and Wilson insist they carefully follow the law, promptly calling child protective officials.

No one knows why, or will say why, such reports never resulted in action.

The cases drop into a bureaucratic black hole where no one is responsible: Child welfare official say they can’t confirm whether they ever got a report, police say they did not receive any reports, and prosecutors say they cannot act until one of the two other agencies does.

“I have been in this office for 16 years and have never heard of a case against a priest,” says Tippecanoe County Prosecutor Jerry Bean, who prosecutes cases in Lafayette, the city where the bishop lives and works.

In this diocese, Weddle says, Higi is the law. “He controls everything. What he says goes.”

Bishop's words reveal struggle over friends who abused

Staff Report

Two of the worst sexual abusers in the Lafayette Diocese were close friends of Bishop William L. Higi, Monsignor Arthur Segó lived and traveled with the bishop. The Rev. Ron Voss grew up in the same neighborhood as Higi in Anderson.

When the abuses of his two friends came to light, it fell to Higi to discipline them. Segó, now retired, is supervised at a priest rest home in Missouri. Voss received therapy and moved to Haiti. He resigned from the priesthood in 1993.

Below, Higi and his vicar general, the Rev. Robert Sell, talk about the pain of finding abusers in the priesthood. Their comments come from interviews and written responses.

Higi on his shock at learning that Segó was an abuser:

"I had no clues at all, none whatsoever, (in) hindsight, you can look back. He was very attracted to children. They flocked to him. "People thought that was wonderful ... But I had no inkling that he was suffering from this illness. He wasn't an obscene man."

Higi on disciplining his friend Voss:

"We knew each other for years. While it would be easy to concentrate on how difficult it was to do what you have to do, on the other hand, the safety of children and the good of the church and the reputation of the priesthood supercede any other considerations."

Higi on punishing pedophile priests:

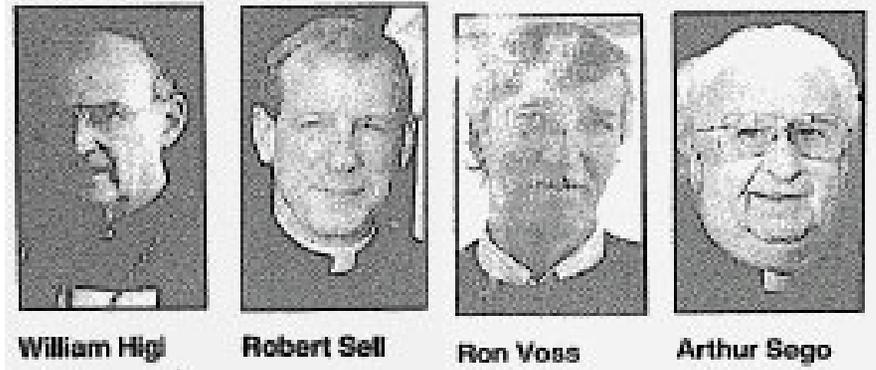
"If you accept the professional view that it's a disorder, incarceration doesn't seem to do anything to address the disorder ... If you're concerned about victims and concerned that this never happen again, it's difficult for me to see how incarceration addresses the basic challenges that are there."

Higi on feeling anger at abusive priests:

"It's a sad thing when someone has this illness. There is a tendency to become angry because it's often confused with a moral defect. Do you get angry when someone who is very close to you dies of cancer? I think you do, but you have to realize that it is an illness."

Vicar General Sell on Higi's friendship with Segó and Voss:

"I don't think it was a case of either one of them taking advantage of a friendship with the bishop ... (If it was) an unfortunate coincidence that these two gentlemen who happen to be personal friends of the bishop were in fact the perpetrators of some very wrongful acts."



William Higi

Robert Sell

Ron Voss

Arthur Segó

Higi on his continuing relationship with Voss and having lived with Segó:

"(The) issue is whether I act responsibly when concerns about priests are brought to my attention. The number of times I may have shook hands with Ron Voss or if I spent time visiting him this past summer (in Haiti) or the number of times I have had dinner with Art Segó is irrelevant to that point."

Higi on the anguish abusers feel at leaving the ministry:

"The pain that individuals who have to give up the priesthood suffer is ... probably more acute than any incarceration would ever be."

Higi on his feelings for victims and their abusers:

"I have the greatest empathy for somebody who has ended up in this situation ... My heart bleeds for the (victims). I can't begin to imagine the agony. And I also empathize for those who have been perpetrators. They have to be absolutely miserable when they begin to comprehend what has happened."

Sell on the pain Higi suffered at his friend's' abuses:

"I can recall some – many painful discussions with the bishop about his own personal feeling of betrayal. And his own feeling of, "I should have seen. I should have known."

"He could easily identify with the victims who had obviously been betrayed and been abused ... (He) felt that the trust and confidence that he had placed in these men was misplaced."

Higi on the pain of disciplining his friends:

"My personal feelings are irrelevant ... The issue is whether this man (the bishop) acts decisively and responsibly."

REV. RONALD VOSS

Correspondence with Theresa Patterson, Executive Director of the Parish Twinning Program of the Americas, Ron Voss' employer in Haiti concerning Voss:

Subj: **E-Mail for Theresa Patterson**

Date: 9/2/2003 9:03:54 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: [Kendrickpt](#)

To: [Parishprogram](#)

Dear Theresa,

Thank you very much for sending me the information on the parish twinning program. I will be in touch again soon.

Also, I am hoping you can answer a question for me. Is the Ron Voss of Visitation House in Port Au Prince the same Ron Voss who admitted to sexually abusing adolescent boys? I believe he was removed from ministry.

If it is the same person, it would seem that children in Haiti have been and are in harm's way. Should I be concerned? Are there any protections in place for children?

Best Regards,
Paul Kendrick

Subj: Re: Ron Voss

Date: 9/8/2003 5:31:06 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: [Kendrickpt](#)

To: [Parishprogram](#)

September 9, 2003

Dear Theresa,

Just a quick followup to my previous letter regarding Ron Voss? I am worried about this situation. Any insight you can provide will be appreciated.

Regards,
Paul Kendrick

REV. RONALD VOSS

Subj: **Re: Ron Voss**

Date: 9/8/2003 9:39:40 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: [Parishprogram](#)

To: [Kendrickpt](#)

Dear Paul,

I have had an incredibly busy 2 weeks with trips to Washington, DC, Evansville, IN and all sorts of things going on here — so I truthfully, have checked my email's in about over a week. Sorry for the delay.

To answer your question about Ron Voss, first of all, he **was not** accused of molesting **adolescent** boys. **Secondly, you unequivocally have absolutely no need for one minute's worry.** PTPA people (easily some 3000-4000) have stayed at Visitation House since 1993. I spend an average of three months a year there. The best answer I can give to anyone is that if I thought there was any concern at all, I would direct people elsewhere.

Theresa Patterson

Subj: **Re: Ron Voss**

Date: 9/8/2003 10:12:36 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: [Kendrickpt](#)

To: [Parishprogram](#)

Dear Theresa,

It may be that I have the wrong Ron Voss. However, when I contacted Bishop Higi in the Diocese of Lafayette, he confirmed that the same Rev. Voss who sexually abused adolescents in Indiana has been working in Haiti for many years. It is my understanding that Rev. Voss was laicized.

Theresa, it is the safety of Haitien children that I am concerned about. If this is the same Ron Voss who sexually abused children in Indiana, then there is cause for concern. A place like Haiti is a perfect hunting ground for pedophiles. I have also contacted a Haitien Rights organization in the US for more information about the physical and sexual abuse of children in Haiti. Protecting children is a passion of mine.

Please help me better understand this situation.

Sincerely,

Paul Kendrick

Cumberland, Maine

REV. RONALD VOSS

Subj: **Fwd: Ron Voss**

Date: 9/11/2003 11:22:31 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: [Kendrickpt](#)

To: [Parishprogram](#)

Dear Theresa,

Each day I am learning more disturbing information about Ron Voss' sexual abuse history. I am becoming extremely uneasy about your organization. I enjoyed our recent telephone conversation and simply need to be reassured that children in Haiti are safe. Voss has daily access to children,. How am I to feel comfortable about that? How can anyone feel comfortable about that?

Paul

Subj: **(no subject)**

Date: 9/12/2003 12:13:38 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: [Parishprogram](#)

To: [Kendrickpt](#)

Paul,

This will be the last and final word I will write to you about Ron Voss. Please don't send me anymore 'stuff' about Ron. You can't possibly send me anything that I haven't already read about Ron. I know Bishop Higi well, his past psychologist in the US, his two priests/spiritual directors in Haiti (one is also a psychologist), and on and on and on. I have known Ron for almost 20 years and have stayed at Visitation House for 10 years. I spend approximately three months a year in Haiti. **If I had one iota of doubt about Ron's present mental state or behavior with children, I would not stay at Visitation House nor encourage others to do so.** And, if you think that I am not concerned about the welfare of children in Haiti, then you are sadly mistaken. I can't give you any greater assurance than that. If you insist on pursuing your concern, then you need to talk with Bishop Higi again (he has stayed at Visitation House several times and keeps in touch with Ron) or you need to find another focus in your life. I assure you that you are wasting your energy and time that can be better spent on helping the Cathedral.

It has been over 10 years since Ron officially left his Diocese. Have you personally talked with Ron, with his psychologists and spiritual directors, stayed at Visitation House, do you know his present state of mind? I suspect not and I think that you are judging him unfairly based on his past history. Forgive me for being so candid, but when you say "how am **I** to feel comfortable about Ron's access to children," I can only think that if you are sitting in Maine worrying about (and judging) Ron without any knowledge of his present life, then I believe that **you** have a problem. **There is such a thing as compassion, forgiveness and, most of all, understanding that human being can try to change his/her life and behavior.**

If you wish for me to remove your name from my mailing list and you don't want to be connected with the program because we stay at Visitation House, then that is your prerogative.

REV. RONALD VOSS

About Voss' work in Haiti:

3rd Quarter 2001 Page 8 of 8

The Parish Twinning Program

Executive Director – Theresa Patterson

Associate Director – Jeff Patterson

The Parish Twinning Program Board

President – Theresa Patterson

Vice-President – **Ron Voss**

Treasurer – Dave Kuk

Secretary – Joe Zelenka

Dick Delio

Ken Firling

Rev. Tuck Grinnell

Tonie Malone

Frances Sosadeeter

Excerpts for The Connection, the Parish Twinning Program's quarterly newsletter (3rd Quarter 2001) ...

... Folks came from all over the state of Indiana on October 3, 1999 to celebrate the Parish Twinning Program's first 20 years.

... Father Bob Klemme read a letter from Bishop Higi, who was unable to attend. He wrote that the day commemorates a reaching across the waters in mutual respect, love and gratitude to God. Theresa Patterson thanked Bishop Higi for his tremendous support and encouragement.

... Two PTPA board member, Dave Kuk and Joe Zelenka are very active in their own Indiana parishes ...

... Our coordinator in Haiti, Bertony Domond and Ron Voss, spent a lot of time getting the containers through the customs maze, and they unloaded them for everyone recently... **Special Thanks**

REV. RONALD VOSS

In this 20th Anniversary year, I would like to thank some very special people who have made this work possible.

LOVE AND GRATITUDE TO:

Ron Voss – Haiti Coordinator of HPTP and gracious host of Visitation House, for years of connecting people and parishes to Haiti through the Program and his deep commitment to justice and peace.

*Board members Dave Kuk, Joe Zelenka, Ken Firling, Fr. Tuck Grinnell, Dick Delio, Tonie Malone and **Ron Voss*** – for their encouragement, guidance, friendship, and for being anchors of strength and support.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana – for their consistent benevolence to the Program and their commitment to twinning relationships.

Parishes – for providing substantial financial support over the years to HPTP – notably, ... *Our Lady of Grace Church*, Noblesville, Indiana

Also listed - board member phone numbers:

Dick Delio – Medfield, MA at (508) 359-7836 (h)

Fr. Tuck Grinnell – Falls Church, VA at (703) 820-7113 (c)

Ken Firling – Alexandria, VA at (703) 836-0034 (h)

Dave Kuk – Carmel, IN at (317) 844-1913 (h)

Toni Malone – Middletown, NJ at (732) 671-5522 (h)

Joe Zelenka – Indianapolis, IN at (317) 283-7061 (h)