

DuBourg High School Teachers Arrested On Sexual Charges

By Mary Jo Goellner
Journal Staff Writer

A Catholic priest and a lay teacher at Bishop DuBourg High School were arrested last week on charges of deviate sexual assault involving a 16-year-old student at the school.

The Rev. James A. Funke, 38, a biology teacher at DuBourg, 5850 Eichelberger St., was accused of sexually assaulting the boy earlier this month in the rectory of St. Bernadette Catholic Church in south county.

Father Funke is an associate pastor at St. Bernadette.

Jerome B. Robben, a history teacher at DuBourg, was charged in warrants issued in St. Louis County Circuit Court.

Both men have been released on \$25,000 bond.

Detective Susan Carr, of the St. Louis County Police sex crimes unit, said police began investigating the incident following a call on the child-abuse hot line last Tuesday.

The two suspects have admitted the offense, Carr said.

Robben, 44, of the 5100 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, did not take part in the incident charged, Carr said.

"But he encouraged the 16-year-old to do these things with the priest," she said. "He wasn't in the room when it happened, but he was aware of it and encouraged it."

Police recovered a video tape of the incident in the priest's room.

Carr said Robben told police he encouraged students to have sexual relations with Father Funke in exchange for personal favors from the priest.

"The priest would fix things for him around his house and his car," Carr said.

The 16-year-old told police the sexual relations with the priest had been taking place for about nine months. He recently told his mother about several incidents at the rectory and she took him to a counselor, who called the child-

abuse hot line.

Police said they found a large amount of child pornography in the suspects' homes, including photographs, homemade videotapes and commercial films.

Carr predicted additional charges might eventually be filed against the two men. But she said she doubts Father Funke sexually abused any youngsters from St. Bernadette's parish.

"From what I can tell, I don't think the priest had any involvement with that school or the children there," she said.

St. Louis police still are investigating Robben's activities as they relate to incidents within the City of St. Louis.

Sgt. Antoinette Filla, of the Crimes Against Persons unit of the Bureau of Investigation, said there could be "possibly more charges" against Robben by the end of the week.

Some information for this story was provided by Journal staff writer Mary Jo Goellner.