

# Clinic's demise left gap in treatment for clergy

## Some lament 1993 closure due to changes in insurance coverage

By **SCOTT WILLIAMS**

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One summer evening, the Rev. Donald Hands and his wife were cleaning up after dinner in their suburban Pittsburgh home when the phone rang.

The call from the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee ended with a job offer.

Hands, an Episcopal priest and licensed psychologist, would soon become executive director of an experimental psychiatric clinic in the Milwaukee suburbs. His new patients: troubled church professionals.

That was in 1987, long before churches in Milwaukee and across the nation were rocked by recent scandals involving sexual

abuse and other misconduct in the priesthood.

Known as St. Barnabas Center, the clinic helped members of the clergy from various denominations confront such issues as depression, addiction and sexual disorders. But after five years, the clinic inside Rogers Memorial Hospital near Oconomowoc closed abruptly when health insurers abandoned the program.

"It was like a comet," Hands said. "It had its brief moment. And then it disappeared."

While Hands and others doubt that St. Barnabas Center and places like it could have helped avert the scandals now sending shock waves through the religious community, many believe that its demise has left a significant gap in treatment options for clergy who have gone astray.

"Does the need still exist? I think so," said George Greene, a former board member at Rogers Memorial Hospital. "Is it being

met? Well, I think you can probably argue that it is not."

### Many treated

Over the years, about 400 patients passed through St. Barnabas Center. Although founded by the Episcopal Church, the clinic was open to any denomination. It was the only operation of its kind in the Milwaukee area and one of about a handful nationwide.

Ex-staffers say the clinic succeeded because it allowed the clergy to shed their cloak of professionalism and deal with personal problems in a retreat-like atmosphere blending psychiatric rehabilitation with spiritual cleansing.

"We had a good thing going. We helped a lot of people," said the Rev. Wayne Fehr, an Episcopal priest and former staffer who co-wrote a book with Hands about their experiences in the clinic.

St. Barnabas Center was the brainchild of the Rev. Michael

Stolpman, an Episcopal Church official who was known for advocating social awareness in the church. A few months after his death in 1990, Stolpman's estate was sued by a woman who alleged that he sexually assaulted her when she was underage. The lawsuit was later dropped.

The psychiatric clinic opened in January 1988 in a three-story wing at Rogers Memorial, a 90-bed facility.

Hands, known in the Episcopal Church for his work as a psychologist, left a position on the faculty at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh to take over the operation.

In recent months, he has served on a task force appointed by the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese to examine how the archdiocese has handled recent sex scandals.

At St. Barnabas Center, Hands and his colleagues offered clinical treatment mixed with specialized

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