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Exorcisms not for amateurs

Clergy sound warnings of psychological dangers

By Leslie Perreux
of The StarPhoenix

Exorcisms take many forms, but Saskatoon clergy say people shouldn't try the at-home version which killed an Ontario toddler this week.

"Some of these amateur things that are going on can be extremely dangerous," said Rev. Colin Clay, chaplain at the University of Saskatchewan.

Four Cambridge, Ont., people are charged with manslaughter in a two-year-old girl's exorcism death. The girl's grandmother, one of the people charged, is a member of the Catholic Church, but church officials said they were not involved in the exorcism.

According to Clay, there are all kinds of exorcisms, from laying on hands and saying prayers to the rare, and extremely formal, Catholic rite.

He said many beliefs about possession are left from ancient days when people thought epilepsy and mental illness were signs of possession by the devil.

"People aren't possessed by demons, they are repressed by evil," he said. Clay said he performs exorcisms occasionally but, in his exorcism, he says prayers while putting his hands on the person's head.

The Rev. Joseph Bisztyo, the Saskatoon authority on Catholic exorcism, said the church has two ways to deal with evil spirits — a deliverance cer-

emony and a full-fledged exorcism.

"In the teachings of the church, we make a distinction between possession and obsession," he said.



Clay



Bisztyo

Bisztyo said the deliverance, a 20-minute ceremony in which prayers are recited and holy water is sprinkled, is used on people convinced they are being affected by evil spirits.

He described being called to "haunted houses" where lights flicker and doors open and close on their own. He's also performed the ceremony on children who suddenly became hyper.

Bisztyo said the more formal exorcism ritual is performed rarely, by order of the bishop when he is sure someone is possessed, after consulting psychiatrists. He said he's never heard of one being done in Saskatchewan.

While Bisztyo said it's important to believe in spirits, some people have over-active imaginations.

"Some people see evil spirits everywhere," he said. "On horror movies, we see so much about Satan, we make the extraordinary seem common."

Both Bisztyo and Clay said it is dangerous for people to try to perform their own exorcism.

"It is serious business," said Bisztyo. "You should not fool around with this kind of practice. It can be harmful, even psychologically."