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**TOP STORIES**

**KMBH pulls plug on documentary**

**Church-owned station decides not to air 'Frontline' episode on child abuse scandal**

By *BRUCE LEE SMITH*  
*Valley Morning Star*

HARLINGEN — The "Hand of God" reached most of the United States Tuesday night, but not the Rio Grande Valley.

This week's Public Broadcasting Service's "Frontline" documentary, an episode called "Hand of God," dealt with the child molestation scandal that rocked the Archdiocese of Boston. But the program did not air locally.

KMBH-TV, the local PBS affiliate that is owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, instead aired a repeat of the previous week's "Frontline," which was about the Taliban of Afghanistan, according to one viewer.

Another viewer, Gerald Brazier, a member of the church reform group Call to Action RGV, said people who called KMBH about the missing episode on Tuesday were told that the station's general manager, Monsignor Pedro Briseño, wanted to watch "Hand of God" before it aired locally to see if it was appropriate for local viewers.

A KMBH staff member who refused to give her name said Briseño was on a previously scheduled annual religious retreat Thursday and was not available for comment.

Viewers who called KMBH on Thursday were told "Hand of God" did not air because PBS did not provide it to the station on time for the regular "Frontline" time slot Tuesday night.

Brownsville Diocese spokeswoman Brenda Nettles Riojas said Thursday she could not contact Briseño, but media questions about the "Hand of God" documentary could be sent by e-mail to him and he would respond today.

Carrie Johnson, senior director of Primetime Publicity for PBS Media Relations in Washington, D.C., said the "Hand of God" episode was fed to PBS stations in the usual manner for all the network's programs. The first feed on Jan. 11 was for local programmers to review the episode. A second feed was done at 8 p.m. CDT Tuesday, the scheduled broadcast time for "Frontline."

Phil Zimmerman, a promotions assistant for "Frontline," said the program's initial research showed that only one other PBS station out of hundreds in the system nationwide did not air "Hand of God," and that "was due to a scheduling conflict," he said.

Most "Frontline" episodes are 60 minutes long; "Hand of God" is 90 minutes in length.

The local station's Web site, [www.kmbh.org](http://www.kmbh.org), shows a 90-minute block on the Jan. 16 schedule where "Frontline" was scheduled to air.

"To our knowledge, (KMBH) is the only station that did not broadcast it due to content," Zimmerman said.

Johnson said there are more than 340 stations in the PBS system. She said only one other PBS station, KBYU in Provo, Utah, is owned by a religious organization, Brigham Young University, which is in turn owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Johnson said each station decides whether to air any episode of any PBS program.

Church reform activists who had wanted to view the missing episode were left hanging.

Brazier said part of the reform Call to Action seeks in the Catholic Church is financial accountability.

"We want to know where the money goes that we contribute to the church," said Guy Hallman, another Call to Action RGV member.

Call to Action RGV also wants to know how much of the Diocese's money has been paid to victims of sexual abuse by local clergy.

Sexual abuse by the clergy in all faiths has been a big topic in this country lately, Hallman said.

"We know there has been some abuse by clergy in this diocese," Hallman said.

Hallman blamed the head of the Diocese of Brownsville, Bishop Raymundo Peña, for the show not airing.

"I can see where this all fits together," Hallman said. "The bishop doesn't want people to be reminded that we may have problems right here in our own diocese that haven't been brought to light.

"The bishop needs to be reminded that we're conscious of that and we're not going to let him just sweep it under the rug.

"We need to face these problems."

Peña, also at the retreat on Thursday, could not be reached for comment.

**TALKBACK**  
Should the local PBS affiliate pull programs it doesn't find appropriate?

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