

BishopAccountability.org

Allegations against Teacher Unearthed in '03

By Rani Gupta
Palm Beach Post [Florida]
March 9, 2004

Martin County school officials said Monday they had learned about allegations of sexual abuse connected with a former Martin County High teacher last year, several months before the ex-priest was charged in a separate case with abusing a 6-year-old New York boy.

Barry Ryan, 56, went on sick leave from his job as a media specialist in April 2003, around the time a reporter for The Mobile Register in Alabama called school district officials about a Mobile County District Attorney's Office investigation into several priests, including Ryan.

Ryan, who lives in the Palm Pointe neighborhood of Palm City, was arrested Thursday in New York and charged with sodomy after he signed a confession admitting he abused the boy in a private Long Island home between May and October 2003 during visits to New York, according to the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office. He pleaded not guilty at his arraignment Friday.

Martin school officials said the reporter's calls were their first indication of the Mobile investigation, which resulted from the district attorney's request for information about Mobile-area priests who had been accused of some kind of sex abuse. Ryan served as an Air Force chaplain in Alabama from 1993 to 1995 and was discharged by the Air Force in 1995.

"It was the first time I ever heard anything of a negative nature about Barry Ryan," said Jack Valerio, an assistant principal at Martin County High. Ryan started as a media specialist at the school in 1998 and was named the school's teacher of the year in 2002. He previously was a substitute teacher at the school.

Martin County High administrators talked to Ryan and within days "he decided he was leaving for his health reasons anyway," Valerio said. Ryan already had been diagnosed with cancer and has told Suffolk County investigators he is terminally ill. After using his sick leave, Ryan retired in October 2003 and never taught again, according to personnel records.

The district conducted a background check on Ryan before he started teaching, but nothing showed up. He was not charged in the Mobile investigation.

Deana Newson, the district's director of human resources and staff development, said she confirmed with school officials that they had never received any complaints about Ryan. Newson also met with Ryan after the reporter's call and asked if he had ever been charged with or convicted of a crime. Ryan answered no, Newson said.

Newson said the district did not investigate further because Ryan never taught again and because law enforcement officials did not contact them.

"We had no reason to," Newson said. "We never received any complaints, no charges were files against him. ... He didn't return to work, so we felt we took every possible step."

Newson said the district filed a complaint Monday with the state Department of Education, which can conduct an investigation and decide on a possible punishment, including the revocation of Ryan's teaching license.

Newson said the district has no cause to conduct its own investigation because "he's no longer our employee."

Ryan also taught a computer class at Indian River Community College in spring of 1998. He was a parishioner at Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Palm City, although officials there say he didn't participate in any parish activities, including those involving children.

"We were very unaware of his presence there at all," said Janice Maniscalco, the church's director of religious education. "He wasn't involved in any of the youth programs."

The New York boy's family contacted the Brooklyn Diocese with the allegation, which the diocese relayed to the district attorney's office. Ryan received treatment this year at the St. Luke's Institute in Maryland for treatment for pedophilia, depression and alcoholism.

Ryan was ordained in 1976 and worked as a priest in New York until 1984. Brooklyn Diocese spokesman Frank DeRosa said there were no complaints against him during his time in New York. He received a leave of absence for personal reasons in 1995, DeRosa said.

Martin County High Principal Joan Hunt said Ryan received praise during his years at the high school.

"He was very well-liked, a very intelligent man, and was very, very well-respected by his colleagues," she said.

Any original material on these pages is copyright © BishopAccountability.org 2004. Reproduce freely with attribution.