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Martin Teacher Admits to Sexually Abusing N.Y. Boy

The Former Martin County High School Teacher, Who Also Is an Ordained Priest, Is Being Held on \$500,000 Bail

By Jeff Brumley
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A non-active priest who was a former teacher of the year at Martin County High School has been charged with sodomizing a boy last year in Long Island, prosecutors in Central Islip, N.Y., said.

Barry E. Ryan, 56, a resident of Martin County since 1997, signed a statement confessing to the sexual assault that occurred between May and October 2003 in a private home, District Attorney Thomas Spota said in Central Islip, N.Y., The Associated Press reported.

Ryan, who lives in Palm City, was jailed in Long Island on Friday on \$500,000 bail, Suffolk County prosecutors said.

Ryan pleaded innocent at his arraignment and was remanded to the Suffolk County jail after he was unable to post bail, said Robert Clifford, a spokesman for the district attorney. Ryan was arrested Thursday and charged with first-degree sodomy.

Ryan, who told police he's suffering from terminal cancer, has not been attached to any parish or performed any priestly duties since 1995, when he was discharged from the Air Force, the district attorney's office said.

Jim Brosemer, a spokesman for the Catholic Diocese of Palm Beach, said Friday that Ryan was registered as a parishioner at Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Palm City, but never worked or volunteered for the parish and had no contact with children there.

Other details of the case were withheld to protect the identity of the boy, who was under the age of 11 at the time of the alleged crime, the district attorney's office said.

According to Martin County School District records, Ryan's first job at Martin County High School was as a substitute teacher in 1997. He became a media specialist at the school in August 1998. He retired in October 2003.

Records from his personnel file contain nothing but praise from administrators and fellow teachers.

The file contained no records of disciplinary actions against Ryan or any reprimands, said Helene Baxter, the district's labor representative. She said Ryan passed a background check.

His annual evaluations consistently contained high marks. His overall rating in several evaluations gave him an overall grade of "distinguished" -- the best possible rating.

"I can tell you I knew of no problems," said Jack Valerio, Martin County High School assistant principal and the author of a glowing letter of recommendation in Ryan's file.

"The time I knew Barry, he was nothing other than an absolutely exemplary human being," Valerio said.

"I can also tell you that his colleagues voted him teacher of the year," Valerio said. "That was two years ago."

Ryan was ordained in 1976 and enlisted as a chaplain in the Air Force in 1984. Before that, he worked at the parishes of St. Joseph and St. Mark in the Brooklyn diocese.

According to a 2003 report by The Associated Press and a January report by the Mobile (Ala.) Register, church officials told an Alabama prosecutor that Ryan had been accused of sexual misconduct while at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery.

The Register reported he was stationed at the base between 1993-95.

The details and outcome of that case could not be determined Friday.

The Brooklyn diocese notified the Suffolk district attorney after receiving information that Ryan allegedly sodomized the youngster during recent visits to Long Island, Suffolk District Attorney's Office Deputy Inspector James Burke told The Associated Press.

The defendant, in his written confession, said he received in-patient treatment for pedophilia, depression and alcoholism this year at St. Luke's Institute, a psychiatric hospital in Silver Spring, Md., Burke said.

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