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Jail Authorities Investigating Report of Attack on Priest

By Frank Eltman
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A terminally ill Catholic priest who was scheduled to be arraigned Friday on charges he sodomized a 6-year-old boy was hospitalized after allegedly being attacked in jail.

"There is an allegation involving another inmate that may have assaulted" Barry E. Ryan, said Chief Alan Otto, a spokesman for Suffolk County Sheriff Alfred Tisch.

He added that an internal affairs investigation is ongoing and confirmed that Ryan "did seek medical attention."

Ryan, 56, a resident of Palm City, Fla., since 1997, signed a statement last week confessing to the sexual assault that occurred between May and October 2003 in a private home of acquaintances on Long Island, District Attorney Thomas Spota said. He was jailed on \$500,000 bond.

He was scheduled to appear before Suffolk County Court Judge Ralph Gazzillo on Friday morning to answer similar charges in an indictment filed this week by a grand jury. But Ryan was a no-show because he had been taken to Central Suffolk Hospital, a prosecutor said.

A hospital spokeswoman could not immediately confirm that Ryan was a patient there and referred calls to the sheriff's department.

Ryan's attorney, Joseph Ostrowski, was in transit from Riverhead back to his office in Brooklyn and not immediately available for comment, a man answering the telephone at his law office said.

The alleged attack on Ryan sparked memories of the killing of former Boston priest John Geoghan, a central figure in the Roman Catholic sex abuse scandal, who was beaten and strangled to death Aug. 23.

Ryan was arrested last week in New York and charged with first-degree sodomy. The priest, 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 U.S. Air Force, the district attorney said.

Ordained in 1976, Ryan enlisted as a chaplain in the Air Force in 1984. Before that he worked at parishes in the Brooklyn diocese.

The diocese notified the Suffolk district attorney about a month ago after receiving information that Ryan allegedly sodomized the youngster during recent visits to Long Island, said Deputy Inspector James Burke.

In the wake of the priest sex abuse scandal that erupted two years ago, Catholic dioceses around the country have vowed to immediately notify law enforcement officials of any allegation of sexual abuse.

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

In recent years, Ryan worked as a media specialist in the Martin County, Fla., high school library. He was named the school's teacher of the year for 2002. He retired last October, reportedly after becoming terminally ill.

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