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Charges Shock Glendale Parish Suit Alleges Pastor Abused Boy

By Stephanie Saul
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With its stately church and respected school, St. Pancras parish has been the bedrock of the Glendale community for decades.

But a sexual abuse claim this week against the pastor of St. Pancras Roman Catholic Church has the parish reeling.

"I don't believe it. Not Father Gallo. I don't know who could have said that. I'm ready to cry," said parishioner Dorothea Signorelli, who has known the Rev. Vincent Gallo for years and knew his parents before him, said yesterday. "He's a beautiful man. Down-to-earth. Very sincere. Will help everyone."

In a lawsuit filed Wednesday in State Supreme Court in Queens that included allegations against 24 priests, Gallo was accused of sexual abuse during the late 1960s, when he was assigned to a Bushwick parish, Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Under rules of the Roman Catholic Church, the Diocese of Brooklyn must launch an investigation of Gallo and two other current priests named in the lawsuit - the Rev. Hugo Bedoya and Msgr. Francis Mulhall.

Bedoya and Mulhall are assigned to the diocesan marriage tribunal, which decides annulment cases.

The accusation against Gallo is almost too much to bear for St. Pancras, where one of Gallo's assistants, the Rev. Brian Keller, was suspended last year following a similar claim. Keller's name was turned over to Queens District Attorney Richard Brown last year by the diocese, which had received complaints about him from former parishioners. He was not among those named in the suit filed Wednesday.

Gallo, reached Wednesday, would not respond directly to the allegation that he abused a young boy. Bedoya referred a reporter to the diocese, and Mulhall did not return a call.

Yesterday, outside the school, groups of parents and other parishioners gathered in agitated discussion and expressed mixed reaction to the allegation against Gallo.

Some said the claim from the 1960s is so old, and they wondered why it had surfaced now. Others expressed outrage.

"I don't care if it happened in 1910," said one woman who arrived to pick up her two children at the school, at Myrtle Avenue and 68th Street. "We've still got to know about it." The woman did not give her name.

George Schwille, a funeral director whose ancestors settled in the parish in 1922, expressed support for Gallo.

"He's our pastor now. He's doing a good job at St. Pancras. What else can I say about the man? It's

40 years ago," Schwille said.

He also wondered aloud about the motivations of attorney Michael Dowd, who filed the lawsuit this week. It is one of several lawsuits Dowd has filed against the Diocese of Brooklyn.

"I just see Michael Dowd's name come up over and over again. It just seems like he has an agenda against the church," Schwille said.

Dowd, a former altar boy who was educated in Catholic schools, said yesterday he is indebted to the church and motivated by reform.

"I'm angry at the criminals who have done so much harm to the church that gave me so much," Dowd said.

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