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Bk'l yn Priest Cleared of Sex Abuse

By Stephanie Saul
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The Diocese of Brooklyn said Friday it had cleared a Bay Ridge priest of sexual-abuse allegations.

The claim that the Rev. Richard Lewkiewicz abused a minor more than 30 years ago had "no merit and no credibility," according to a statement by Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio.

DiMarzio said a retired city police detective conducted an investigation into Lewkiewicz, who serves as parochial vicar at Our Lady of Angels Roman Catholic Church.

The investigation included "an extensive series of interviews over a considerable period of time" and found "no evidence" that Lewkiewicz had sexually abused a minor, according to DiMarzio's written statement released by diocesan spokesman Frank DeRosa.

The detective reported her findings to an independent review panel appointed by the diocese.

The allegation against Lewkiewicz, 62, was first disclosed in a \$300 million lawsuit last year against 24 current and former priests of the Diocese of Brooklyn. The plaintiffs included a Maine resident who alleged that Lewkiewicz sexually abused him at Blessed Sacrament Church in Cypress Hills in 1970.

The finding clearing Lewkiewicz was read at seven Masses at Our Lady of Angels on Oct. 30 and 31, according to the Brooklyn diocese, which also includes Queens. Commenting Friday, Lewkiewicz said, "I'm just happy the truth came out that I wasn't involved in this. It was a big relief to me. It wasn't true at all."

But Manhattan attorney Michael G. Dowd, who filed the suit along with lawyer Susan Egan, questioned any decision by the diocese.

"I think everything we know suggests the diocese lacks credibility in any act it takes that relates to allegations of abuse," he said.

The lawsuit was dismissed by a Queens Supreme Court justice on grounds the allegations were too old. Dowd and Egan have appealed.

Lewkiewicz is the second active priest named in the lawsuit who has have been cleared by the diocese.

However, the diocese announced earlier this year that it had permanently removed another priest, the Rev. Joseph Byrns, who was the subject of similar allegations and also a defendant in one of the cases. Byrns faces criminal sexual abuse charges in Brooklyn.