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## **Priest Quits over Fondling Allegation**

Served W. Milford for Nearly 2 Decades

By John Chadwick  
Record  
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A veteran priest has been forced to resign from a West Milford parish because of a 1986 allegation of sexual misconduct.

The Rev. Bernard Splawski, a priest with the Franciscan order, left St. Joseph's Church last week after 17 years as an assistant priest and, more recently, as the parish's pastor.

Parishioners were told the news during Sunday Mass.

The accusation dates to Splawski's days as a teacher at a Catholic high school in Buffalo, N.Y., where an 18-year-old male student accused him of improper touching.

The Franciscans said in a statement Tuesday that Splawski was sent for "appropriate treatment" at the time of the incident.

He was then transferred to a Franciscan community in New York City and assigned to St. Joseph's.

But the Franciscans apparently never revealed the allegation to the Diocese of Paterson, which runs the parish. Unlike diocesan priests, Franciscans report to their own communities, rather than to a local bishop.

"When they transferred him here, the Franciscans did not inform the diocese of the allegation," said Marianna Thompson, a spokeswoman for Bishop Frank Rodimer.

A spokesman for the Franciscans could not be reached Tuesday. But in a written statement, the Franciscan provincial in New York City stressed Splawski was never in trouble again.

"Since that time, Father Bernard has ministered faithfully, without similar incident," the statement said.

The accuser's family contacted the diocese last month and questioned Splawski's fitness to serve as a priest. The diocese turned the matter over to the Franciscans, who conducted their own review and decided to remove Splawski.

"In the present climate, this kind of complaint, even about behavior long past, gravely impairs the trust that is needed to minister effectively," the Franciscans said.

It was unclear from the statement whether Splawski would remain a priest or in public ministry.

"Bernard continues to be our brother, and we will do all we can to support him during this time of painful transition to a new phase of his life," the statement said.

In November, the nation's bishops approved a sexual abuse policy calling for the removal of any priest from public ministry after one instance of sexual abuse of a minor.

The religious orders, however, which include nearly 15,000 priests and 6,000 brothers, have not

officially adopted the policy.

A spokeswoman for the organization representing those religious communities said Monday that the bishops and the leaders of the orders are expected to meet soon to determine how the policy should be worked out for their communities.

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