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Priest Is Target of Sexual-Abuse Claim

By Michael Beebe
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The Rev. William F. White, past director of planning and research for the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo and a priest known for his thought-provoking sermons at St. Louis Catholic Church, has been relieved of his duties after an allegation of sexual abuse.

Father White, the latest priest accused of sexual improprieties involving a young parishioner, was placed on leave when the diocese learned of the allegations in February 1993. The allegations were aired Monday evening on WKBW-TV.

"We investigated the allegations, and within a matter of days Father White was placed on leave, and his faculties to act as a priest were suspended," Monsignor Robert J. Cunningham, diocesan vicar general, said in a prepared statement.

"During the past week," the statement added, "an added allegation was made, and we are now investigating that allegation."

The diocese provided no further details, but according to the Channel 7 report, the alleged incident took place 20 to 25 years ago.

A man identified only as Kevin told the television station that he was abused about 10 times by Father White after he was sent to the priest's South Buffalo home for disciplining when he was caught clowning around in parochial school.

"Each time it was something new, something different, and it got worse from there," the man said. He also said that since then he "never felt comfortable around children, not even my own."

He broke down in tears and said of Father White, "He took away the years my kids were growing up."

Father White, who is in his early 50s, is a tall, powerfully built man who looks like he might have played football in his youth.

A well-loved priest by his former parishioners at St. Louis, the diocese's mother church, he was known for taking ordinary events and turning them into powerful statements in his sermons, delivered in a distinctive, almost lilting voice.

He has always ended his sermons with the phrase, "Think about it."

One of his church members today said he felt like he had been kicked in the stomach after hearing the allegations.

Another, Bob Albert, a retired

Buffalo Fire Department dispatcher who served as a church usher, said Father White always took the time to greet people at St. Louis and make them feel welcome.

"If this is true, and I don't know that it is true," Albert said of the allegations, "the church is losing one

of the finest priests I have ever had the pleasure to know."

Father White is the son of the late Dr. William White, a well-known surgeon in South Buffalo who served as the Fire Department's surgeon.

During his career, Father White has served as an associate director at Buffalo Boys Town, was associate pastor at St. John the Evangelist, Our Lady of Loretto and Queen of Heaven parishes; was chaplain at the Erie County Holding Center, the Amherst Presbyterian Nursing Center and Episcopal Church Home of Western New York; and director of planning and research for the diocese. He was a weekend associate at St. Louis from 1988 until he was relieved of his duties last year.

Father White was briefly in the headlines in the late 1970s when he was on the board of directors of Onyx Construction Co. and co-signed for a loan to get the firm started.

The company was investigated as a phony minority front, but Father White said he became involved because of a parishioner.

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