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2nd Leader in Parish Is Suspended over Abuse

By Daniel J. Wakin
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A top education official for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York has been suspended and barred from acting as an ordained deacon after he was accused of sexually abusing a minor 20 years ago, the archdiocese said yesterday.

The official, Arthur Manzione, was removed from his job as associate secretary for education on Aug. 12, said the spokesman for the archdiocese, Joseph Zwilling. Mr. Manzione was also prohibited from performing the duties of a deacon, which include baptizing, preaching and performing marriage ceremonies.

He was a deacon at St. Anthony of Padua parish in West Harrison, in Westchester County, which lost its pastor a month ago in a similar case. Both complaints date back to the early 1980's, when both men were stationed at Sacred Heart parish in Newburgh, N.Y.

Mr. Zwilling said a complaint about Mr. Manzione had come to the archdiocese in the week before the suspension, which is a mandatory step pending an investigation under the archdiocese's sexual abuse guidelines. Parishioners were told of the dismissal at Masses last weekend.

The spokesman declined to give details of the sexual abuse accusation. The Orange County district attorney's office said any charges brought based on the information would have been misdemeanors. In any event, even if the charges were valid, too much time had passed for prosecution, the office said.

The district attorney's office said that it received an anonymous telephone call about Mr. Manzione on July 28 and that it notified the archdiocese after an investigation. Once the anonymous caller identified himself to the archdiocese, it investigated further and proceeded with suspension. "We couldn't do anything unless he gave us his name, and he agreed to do that," Mr. Zwilling said.

Mr. Manzione could not be reached for comment. His number is unlisted and he did not answer a phone message left at the archdiocese.

Mr. Manzione was ordained in 1979 and had spent 11 years as superintendent of the 55 Catholic elementary schools in Westchester and Putnam Counties before being promoted last year to the archdiocese's central education office.

That promotion itself was an effect of the church's sexual abuse scandal. It came about in a reorganization of the department because the vicar for education, Msgr. Thomas J. Bergin, had been assigned as administrator of St. Raymond's parish in the Bronx in place of its accused pastor.

Mr. Zwilling said the deacon was made an associate secretary along with two others to help Monsignor Bergin's replacement, and was in charge of day-to-day operations at education department offices.

Mr. Manzione's dismissal was the second recent scandal at St. Anthony of Padua. Its pastor, the Rev. Lawrence C. Inzeo, was removed in July.

While the accusations came from parishioners at Sacred Heart when the two men served there, Mr. Zwilling said they were unrelated. Father Inzeo was an assistant pastor and Mr. Manzione was also principal of the elementary school. It was not clear whether the charges were connected to his role as principal or deacon.

As the number of priests decreases, permanent deacons play an important role in the parishes. They can marry and carry out some priestly functions, but cannot celebrate Mass or hear confessions. The Official Catholic Directory lists 356 permanent deacons in the New York Archdiocese, and 524 active diocesan priests. The pastors in the churches where they serve are responsible for supervising them.

Mr. Manzione is the first deacon the archdiocese has suspended, Mr. Zwilling said, since the sexual abuse scandal began enveloping the church nearly two years ago. Since then, at least 13 priests in the archdiocese have been removed from ministry and are to be told the church's final decision by Cardinal Edward M. Egan. No such decision has yet been publicly announced.

A national lay review board established by the nation's bishops to monitor dioceses' performance in protecting children from sexual abuse is sending teams of auditors around the country. A team is to arrive in New York next week.

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