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Utica Priest Accused of Sexual Abuse

Associated Press State & Local Wire
May 3, 2002

A priest sexually abused a teen-ager in the mid-1970s while he was a high school principal, the alleged victim's attorney claimed in a letter sent Friday to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse.

The letter accused Monsignor Charles Sewall, now retired at St. Agnes Church in Utica, with having sexual contact in 1975 with the then 13-year-old boy inside a trailer next to Notre Dame High School in Utica, said Frank Policelli, the victim's attorney.

According to the claim, Sewall had the fully-clothed boy on the floor and began touching him inappropriately, Policelli said. The boy was not a student but did odd jobs around the building for Sewall, Policelli said.

"Sometimes he was paid money for his work. Sometimes he was paid for no reason at all just to keep coming back," he said.

Although it was the only instance, the incident left the victim, now 40, with "emotional and psychological damages," Policelli said.

The victim, who now lives in Rome, had repressed the incident since it occurred, Policelli said. However, the recent revelations about widespread sexual abuse by priests and a planned testimonial dinner for Sewall triggered memories for the victim, he said.

In a statement released Friday, Sewall admitted to sexual misconduct in a separate incident that was later settled but he did not address the latest allegation.

Policelli said the next step was up to the diocese.

Diocese spokeswoman Danielle Cummings confirmed the diocese received the letter Friday regarding new allegations against Sewall.

Cummings said the diocese would investigate the recent claim under its new policy for dealing with sexual abuse allegations against clergy announced Monday by Bishop James Moynihan.

The new policy establishes a victim's advocate and a lay advisory board. It provides for immediate reassignment and mandatory psychological evaluations in cases of credible claims but it does not require church officials to notify authorities about such claims.

Because neither the victim's advocate nor lay advisory board positions are expected to be filled until at least the end of May, Moynihan will review the new allegation against Sewall, she said.

Policelli said the other victim who settled a claim against Sewall in 1988 was considering renewing his claim.

"His understanding of the settlement was that Sewall would not be allowed around children. He feels the church did not live up to its part of the settlement," said Policelli, who declined to discuss the terms of the settlement.

The second victim claims Sewall had repeated sexual intercourse with him when he was 13 to 19 years old, Policelli said.

In his statement, Sewall admitted to sexual misconduct with the individual, who he said received counseling and financial assistance as part of the settlement.

"There are no words that can be offered to express how much I regret that period in my life," Sewall said in the statement.

Sewall was principal at Utica Catholic Academy, which later merged with Notre Dame, from 1967 through 1979, Cummings said.

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