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Priest Placed on Leave over Sex Abuse Charge

Two Churches Lose Sunday Masses

By Jim Wright
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SIDNEY -- A semi-retired Catholic priest serving parishes in Sidney, Unadilla and Franklin has been placed on administrative leave following an accusation that he sexually abused a child in the Diocese of Brooklyn in the late 1950s.

The Rev. Joseph Schuck was withdrawn from public ministry by Bishop Thomas V. Daily of Brooklyn and Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany.

The allegation and Schuck's removal were announced over the weekend to parishioners at Sacred Heart Church in Sidney and St. Paul's Church in Franklin, both in Delaware County; and St. Ambrose Church in Unadilla, Otsego County.

Schuck, who lives at the Gilead House of Prayer in Unadilla, was a weekend associate at Sacred Heart and had celebrated Sunday Mass for 40 parishioners in Franklin and roughly 30 parishioners in Unadilla, said the Rev. Gordon Polenz of Sacred Heart Church in Sidney.

Schuck could not be reached for comment.

"It was just total shock. Nobody had seen it coming," said Polenz, who has been at Sacred Heart for 16 1/2 years. People said nothing and just left, he said.

No allegations of sexual misconduct have been made against Schuck during his 25 years in the Albany Diocese, which oversees the Sidney, Unadilla and Franklin parishes, diocesan officials said. The single allegation from the 1950s is the only one the Brooklyn Diocese has received against the priest, Daily said.

The Brooklyn Diocese conducted a preliminary investigation and deemed the accusation credible, Daily said.

Schuck was ordained in the Diocese of Brooklyn in 1953 and moved to upstate New York in the late 1970s to care for his aging parents, Hubbard said.

Schuck had provided religious services for Scouts and Scouting leaders in the Sidney and Unadilla areas and had been honored in the past with Boy Scout awards for his work, local parishioners said.

St. Paul's and St. Ambrose will no longer have Sunday services, Polenz said.