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Six Abuse Cases Reported by Palm Beach Diocese since Its '84

By Elizabeth Clarke
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By comparison, the Diocese of Palm Beach had few allegations to report to a national study on sexual abuse in the church released Friday.

In the report, commissioned by U.S. Catholic bishops in 2002 and conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, The Palm Beach Diocese reported six allegations against six priests since it was formed in 1984. The Archdiocese of Boston found 815 allegations against 162 priests since 1950. And the Archdiocese of Miami, formed in 1958, reported 64 allegations against 38 priests.

The Palm Beach Diocese includes Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee counties. The Miami Archdiocese included Palm Beach and Martin counties until 1984. Okeechobee, Indian River and St. Lucie counties were part of the Miami Archdiocese from 1958 until 1968, when they joined the Diocese of Orlando.

Exactly which allegations the Palm Beach Diocese reported is not clear. Bishop Gerald Barbarito declined interviews Friday, and officials would not identify the reported cases. Barbarito issued a statement in which he called the study "another sign of the pledge to accountability and transparency" made by bishops to heal the church.

Here are some of the allegations that have touched the Palm Beach Diocese. Presumably, all were reported to the national study by one diocese or another - but only six by the Diocese of Palm Beach.

In addition, an unnamed priest from the Palm Beach Diocese was accused in 2002 of abusing a boy a decade earlier.

* Charles Cassetta: Accused of assaulting a female student while a teacher at Cardinal Newman High in 1971 and 1972. Cassetta has left the priesthood.

* Edwin Collins: Accused in 1998 of inappropriately touching a 13- or 14-year-old boy. Collins had retired from a New York diocese to Wellington and assisted with Mass at St. Matthew Catholic Church. He has retired.

* Rocco D'Angelo: Accused of abusing 11-year-old Kevin Sidaway while a priest at St. Mark in Boynton Beach in the 1960s. The case was settled in 1998.

* Peter Duvelsdorf: Accused of abusing two boys in Long Island before transferring to the Palm Beach Diocese in 1991. In 1997, he was charged with exposing himself at a St. Lucie County park and removed from the church.

* Anthony Failla: Accused of molesting a 12-year-old boy in the 1970s while in New York. He has denied the allegations. He celebrated Masses in Boca Raton in 2001 and 2002 and has been removed from the diocese.

* Matthew Fitzgerald: Accused in 2000 of fondling a 15-year-old boy while at Ascension Catholic Church in Boca Raton in 1991 and 1992. A lawsuit is pending. Fitzgerald has been defrocked.

- * Frank Flynn: Accused in 2002 of abusing a 12-year-old girl in the 1980s in Palm Beach Gardens. A lawsuit is pending. Removed from the ministry, he lives in Ireland.
- * Francis Maloney: Accused in 2002 of trying to seduce a Port St. Lucie boy while at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. A lawsuit filed is pending.
- * Anthony O'Connell: Bishop from 1999 until 2002, he resigned after admitting sexual misconduct with a teen 25 years earlier. He faces lawsuits from several men who say he abused them.
- * Philip Rigney: Accused of molesting two generations of boys in a New Jersey family while a priest there, he said Mass at St. Peter in Jupiter from 1991 until his retirement in 2001.
- * William Romero: Admitted misconduct over 10 years with a Port St. Lucie boy he met in 1982 while at St. Christopher in Hobe Sound. He faces three lawsuits and has left the priesthood.
- * J. Keith Symons: Bishop from 1990 to '98, he resigned that year after admitting he molested five boys more than a quarter of a century earlier.
- * William White: Accused of abusing a New York student in the 1970s. He began teaching at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach in 1994 but resigned in 2002 when confronted by officials.

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