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Norwich Priest Resigns after Being Accused of Assaulting Child 30 Years Ago

The Rev. McConaghy Denies the Accusation

By Ethan Rouen
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Norwich - A priest who served in the Diocese of Norwich for 24 years was forced to resign in February after he was accused of sexually assaulting a child in New York 30 years ago, a spokeswoman for the diocese said Monday.

The Rev. R. Thomas McConaghy stepped down as a pastor when the diocese received a report Feb. 23 that a man accused the priest of sexually abusing him from 1973 to 1975 while the man was a student at the LaSalle Military Academy in Oakdale, N.Y., a letter from Bishop Michael R. Cote to parishioners said.

The priest, who last served as pastor at Sacred Heart Parish in Norwichtown and the mission church of St. John in Fitchville, was a teacher at the school at the time of the incident, said Jacqueline Keller, the diocesan spokeswoman.

"This resignation must not be construed as an admission of any of the allegations against him," Cote wrote. "Rather it should stand as an expression of his concern to the Parish and the Diocese of Norwich."

McConaghy vehemently denied the charges during speeches to parishioners following masses Sunday and Monday, Keller said.

The Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., received the complaint "of substantial allegations of sexual abuse" and notified authorities. No criminal or civil charges have been filed against the priest, Keller said.

Church protocol requires that a priest step down following accusations of abuse. He can be reinstated if the accusations prove false.

During the time the alleged abuse occurred, McConaghy was a LaSalle Christian Brother, not an ordained priest, Keller said. The LaSalle brotherhood was founded in France. Members take a vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and focus their efforts on running schools.

McConaghy was ordained as a priest in Norwich in 1981 and has been well-liked in the diocese, according to Cote's letter.

"I take this opportunity to acknowledge his fine priestly work and to thank him for the dedication to all of you," he wrote.

Keller said that no other people have claimed that the priest abused them, but asked anyone who has been inappropriately treated by McConaghy to call the diocese's report and assistance line at 800-624-7407.