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L.I. Priest Arrested On Child Porn Charges

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(CBS/AP) Central Islip, N.Y. A Roman Catholic priest, after pleading not guilty to possessing child pornography at his federal court arraignment, was released Friday after voluntarily agreeing to enter a secure psychiatric facility.

The Rev. Thomas G. Saloy, 45, an administrator at the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Roosevelt, was arrested on Friday following an investigation that commenced more than a year ago when the priest's name appeared in an unrelated case in Wisconsin.

His attorney said the priest eventually would be transferred to a program in Maryland that treats sex offenders.

According to a criminal complaint unsealed Friday, FBI agents who seized computer equipment near Milwaukee in September 2005 found an e-mail from Saloy on a computer hard drive, allegedly depicting sexually explicit images of boys. The FBI, working with the Suffolk County Computer Crimes Unit, then opened an investigation into Saloy, who was assigned to a church in West Babylon at the time.

Chief Magistrate Judge Michael L. Orenstein grilled both the prosecution and defense about security issues and other concerns before agreeing to allow Saloy to be released so he can receive psychiatric treatment at the Mercy Medical Center in Rockville Centre. Assistant U.S. Attorney Allen Bode and defense attorney Peter Rubin assured the judge that Saloy would be locked inside a secure part of the hospital.

They said Saloy was scheduled to be transferred on Nov. 27 to St. Luke's Institute in Silver Spring, Md., which runs a program for sex offenders. Orenstein again received assurances that Saloy would not be released from that facility without the court's approval.

In September 2006, an undercover detective posing as a 16-year-old boy allegedly was contacted by Saloy in an America Online chat room, according to the complaint. During a sexually related conversation, Saloy requested a child pornography image. He allegedly repeated the request a month later.

Investigators obtained a warrant and on Nov. 9, they searched the rectory of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church. Prosecutors said Saloy acknowledged that he had visited AOL chat rooms and that he had requested and received sexually explicit images of teenagers 15 to 16 years old.

He also said that he occasionally received images of very young children, which he deleted, according to prosecutors.

Although he did not elaborate, Bode said at some point during the latter stages of the investigation, Saloy allegedly engaged in a "suicidal gesture" that required his admittance to the Mercy psychiatric unit.

Rubin, who offered no details on the suicide issue, noted there were no allegations that his client had

sexually abused anyone.

"The charges do not contain any accusations, any evidence, of any physical contact with any minor, any electronic contact with a minor or any other contact whatsoever," Rubin said. Members of the Saloy family were in the front row of the courtroom for the brief proceeding, but declined to comment on the case.

A forensic search of computer equipment belonging to Saloy allegedly found more than 1,300 images and videos of children engaged in sexually explicit conduct. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in prison.

Sean Dolan, a spokesman for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, said Saloy was placed on administrative leave. The priest may not wear clerical garb, including the Roman collar, and may not celebrate Mass in public, Dolan said. Saloy was not in clerical garb at his arraignment.

Bishop William Murphy, the head of the diocese, "was deeply saddened to learn the news" and said the diocese would cooperate with the investigation and conduct its own probe, Dolan said.

The diocese, which has 1.5 million Catholics, was one of the centers of the priest abuse scandal in the United States. A grand jury in 2003 found dozens of priests allegedly abusing children across Long Island, but no indictments were handed down because the statutes of limitations had expired long ago.

The investigation was part of the U.S. Justice Department's "Project Safe Childhood" initiative, which was launched in February 2006.

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