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Former Chaplain Charges Sex Trial 'Smear Campaign'

By Ellis Henican
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The former chaplain of a Catholic high school in the Bronx, on trial on charges of molesting one of his altar boys, said yesterday that he is being made a scapegoat for his persistent ministry to AIDS patients.

"There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that this is a smear campaign," the Rev. Bernard Lynch said in an interview after opening arguments in his trial on sexual-abuse charges. "I'm not that kind of person."

Lynch, who was chaplain at toney Mount St. Michael Academy in Riverdale, faces up to seven years in prison in a nonjury trial before State Supreme Court Justice Burton Roberts.

Assistant Bronx District Attorney Sean Walsh yesterday portrayed Lynch as fondling a vulnerable 14-year-old who had come to think of the priest as a friend.

Lynch's attorney, Michael Kennedy, contended that it was the teenager - not the priest - who made a sexual pass one evening in January, 1985.

The young man, John Schaefer, is now 19 and will take the stand when trial resumes this morning.

"Lynch made advances to him," the assistant district attorney told the court. "He said that he would leave the order if John Schaefer would [have sexual relations with] him. He said, 'We could live together. We could sleep together.' "

Defense attorney Kennedy described the teenager as "a very emotional, highly disturbed young man who was in fact victimized sexually by a member of his own family," an uncle.

Schaefer, Kennedy said, had few friends his own age. He was, the lawyer said, "kind of prissy and indrawn . . . His relationships became focused on adult males."

Long after the alleged assault, Kennedy noted, the priest and the young man remained friendly.

Schaefer contradicted himself repeatedly in his own tellings of the story, Kennedy said. The young man recently filed a \$ 5-million civil suit against the priest, which was tossed out of court.

As for Lynch himself, he said he continues his work with AIDS patients.

Standing amid several dozen supporters who turned out for the opening of trial, Lynch said he intends to take the stand in his own defense.

"I have for the longest time stood up for and by the gay community, the gay Catholic community in New York," he said. "I am the scapegoat of a witchhunt."

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