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Oneida Priest Admits Affair, Resigns William Lorenz Says He Had Relationship with Oswego High School Girl in 1970s

By Renee K. Gadoua
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An Oneida priest has resigned from his parish because he had a sexual relationship with a female teen-ager 30 years ago.

"It was the most difficult thing I had to do in my life," said the Rev. William Lorenz, 64, who told his parishioners last weekend he was stepping down after seven years as pastor at St. Joseph Church, Oneida.

Bishop James M. Moynihan summoned Lorenz to his office June 18 and asked him to resign from the parish, Lorenz said.

Lorenz was a guidance counselor at the former Oswego Catholic High School when he began the relationship with 16-year-old student Victoria Howard. Howard, now Victoria Love, said Tuesday she is relieved to hear Lorenz will no longer serve in public ministry.

"I think it will help my healing greatly," she said. "I feel like so much had been robbed from my early adolescent life and prevented me from having a normal active life because of the damage."

The resignation request came just days after Moynihan and Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Costello voted with the overwhelming majority of U.S. bishops to approve a national policy on clergy sexual abuse.

Under the new policy, called a charter, priests who have committed sexual abuse will be permanently removed from the ministry and all allegations will be reported to legal authorities.

Lorenz can no longer say Mass publicly, wear clerical garb or present himself as a priest, said Danielle Cummings, communications director for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse.

Lorenz said he regrets having had the relationship, which began when he was in his 30s. He would not say how long the relationship lasted, but said, "It was not a one-time incident."

"It's a mistake that I made in my life and one I'm ashamed of and was very unwise," he said.

He said he expected the bishop's call but was surprised at how quickly he was asked to leave his parish.

The diocese first learned of Lorenz's relationship when Love contacted local church officials in 1993, Cummings said.

"The diocese followed its policy," she said. "Lorenz was confronted, and the accuser was offered financial and psychiatric assistance."

The diocese paid Love \$17,710 for counseling, Cummings said.

The diocese sent Lorenz to St. Luke Institute in 1993, she said.

Experts at the Maryland psychiatric hospital cleared Lorenz to return to ministry, Cummings said.

There have been no other allegations against him, she said.

Lorenz also served at Our Lady of Lourdes, Utica; St. Bernard Church, Waterville; St. Mary Church, Hamilton; Notre Dame High School, Utica; St. Mary Church, Oswego; St. Peter Church, Utica; St. Andrew Church and St. James Church, both in Syracuse; and St. Patrick Church, Forestport.

In 1993, Lorenz wrote a letter apologizing to Love.

The handwritten letter, addressed to "Vicky" and signed "Bill," made no reference to a sexual relationship.

"On thinking back, I apologize for my neglect in helping and guiding you at a time in your life when you needed it the most," Lorenz wrote. "Instead, in my own lack of wisdom, I did not help you with your traumatic experience but perhaps made everything more difficult for you."

Love, 48, of Rochester said that in 1972 she went to Lorenz in his capacity as a guidance counselor to talk about abuse by a foster parent.

"Instead of doing the right thing, he turned around and put his hands around me," she said. "As a vulnerable young teen-ager, I was taken advantage of."

She said the first sexual contact occurred when "he gave me a ride home from school and we went down to the lake. He gave me beer, and I was drunk."

She said during the relationship, which she said lasted through the late 1970s, she met Lorenz nearly every week.

Love said she did not end the relationship because she was confused. "I guess I was too vulnerable and stupid to not see him anymore," she said.

Love has been married five times and has a 15-year-old daughter. She said she has had a hard time keeping jobs. She works for a Rochester agency that works with people with developmental disabilities.

She said she has had mental health problems and battles alcoholism.

Cummings said Moynihan will be at this weekend's Masses at St. Joseph Church to discuss the new policy and answer questions about the Lorenz case.

He is also reviewing cases and "applying the standards of the charter to those who had been approved for ministry after psychological treatment," she said.

Next, she said, the bishop will review cases involving priests already removed from ministry.

"We are moving forward, but the charter has not been approved by the Vatican," she said. "There are still procedural questions on ways in which the charter should be implemented."

Since the national priest sex-abuse scandal emerged, officials in the Syracuse diocese have refused to name priests accused of sexual abuse. Including Lorenz, they have acknowledged investigating seven priests for credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor.

Lorenz said he does not know where he will live or what type of work he will do now that he can no longer do public ministry.

"I'm still a priest," he said. "This does limit what I can do."

His parishioners' sympathetic response - including more than 40 letters of support sent to the bishops
- to his admission provides comfort, he said.

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