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Priest's 'sick leave' cited; Hiatus followed 1979 abuse claim

BYLINE: By **David Armstrong** and Diego Ribadeneira, Globe Staff

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A Roman Catholic **priest** accused of sexually abusing 21 children at several area parishes during the past four decades was placed on **sick leave** in 1980 after a mother told church officials he was molesting her boys, according to interviews and church records.

At the end of his **sick leave**, however, the Rev. John J. Geoghan was returned to duty in 1981 and allegedly molested children at two more parishes until he was again placed on **sick leave** in 1995.

The brief **sick leave** in 1980 is the first indication that church officials may have been aware of allegations Geoghan was sexually assaulting children. A spokesman for the Archdiocese of Boston, John Walsh, said the church would not comment on the allegations against Geoghan because some of his alleged victims have sued.

The archdiocese will not reveal the current whereabouts of Geoghan. The 61-year-old **priest** has not commented on the allegations against him.

In addition, Ken McLean, another alleged victim, said his mother notified officials at St. Mary of the Annunciation in Melrose that Geoghan was molesting children in 1972. McLean said his mother was warned it was a sin to talk about a **priest** and she should remain silent so he could seek treatment.

Another woman also told the Globe that she had complained to church officials in 1979 about the **priest** molesting her three sons while he was at St. Andrew's Church in Forest Hills.

The Rev. Francis H. Delaney, who supervised Geoghan prior to his **sick leave** in 1980, said he was never told why Geoghan was removed from St. Andrew's.

"I was under the impression he had some sort of breakdown," said Delaney, who is now retired, "but I was never told. They have this thing about confidentiality."

Delaney, noting that no parents ever came to him with allegations about Geoghan, said he was shocked to read news reports of alleged victims' lawsuits against the **priest**.

During his **sick leave** in 1980, Geoghan was listed as residing at his mother's address on Pelton Street in West Roxbury, but it is unclear if he actually lived there or received some sort of treatment elsewhere. Geoghan has lived at the Pelton Street home off and on throughout his career, but neighbors said it has been several weeks since they saw him. Relatives of the **priest** live in the home now.

Geoghan recently moved out of Regina Cleri, a retirement home for Catholic **priests** in Boston where he had been assigned to work in 1993, officials there said.

In the meantime, more people continue to step forward and claim they were sexually assaulted by the **priest**. Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian said yesterday he now represents 14 men who say they were abused

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as children by the **priest**. Another Boston attorney, Paul Mitchell, said he represents seven people, including a woman, who claim they were abused as children by Geoghan.

Over 31 years following his ordination in 1962, Geoghan served in six parishes across the Boston area. So far, he has been accused of molesting eight children while he was at Blessed Sacrament in Saugus from 1962 to 1966; one child while he served at St. Paul's in Hingham from 1967 to 1974; six children while he was at St. Andrew's in Forest Hills from 1974 to 1980; one child while he was at St. Brendan's in Dorchester from 1981 to 1984; and five children while he served at St. Julia's in Weston from 1984 to 1993.

The allegations against Geoghan include fondling children's genitals, placing children on his lap to achieve sexual stimulation, and having sexually explicit conversations with children.

Later this month, Garabedian is planning to file a civil lawsuit against the **priest** on behalf of five boys who allege they were molested by Geoghan when he served at St. Andrew's from 1974 to 1980. It was the mother of three of those boys who complained to church officials in 1979 about the **priest's** behavior.

The woman, who spoke to the Globe on the condition she not be identified, said she went to the chancery, the archdiocesan headquarters, and made her complaints to a church official. The woman said she was told that the archdiocese would investigate the matter. Later, the woman said, another church official told her the archdiocese was arranging treatment for Geoghan.

In 1980, a year after the woman complained to the archdiocese, Geoghan was placed on **sick leave**.

Geoghan returned to parish service in 1981 and, according to a lawsuit filed in Suffolk Superior Court, began molesting a 7-year-old boy at St. Brendan's Church in Dorchester. The assaults continued until 1983, the lawsuit charges.

The **priest** is also accused of molesting five children from two families while assigned to St. Julia's Church in Weston. Last year, the Archdiocese placed Geoghan on probation for one year after he was charged with making sexually explicit telephone calls to two of the children.

The Suffolk County district attorney's office is reviewing allegations against Geoghan and considering whether criminal charges should be filed against him.

Though he would not discuss the Geoghan case, Walsh said the archdiocese is eager to "face up" to the issue of clergy sexual abuse. "We are not choosing to take a defensive posture on the problem," he said. "Those who are pursuing legal recourse are within their rights."

Ken McLean, who says he was molested by Geoghan, said his family became friendly with Geoghan when he was assigned to Blessed Sacrament Church in Saugus. He said Geoghan continued to visit his home after being assigned to another parish.

After his mother complained to church officials, McLean said, "they basically told my mother not to say anything, that they would handle it. At the time we didn't realize the extent of it."

PERSON: JOHN C WALSH (57%);

COUNTRY: UNITED STATES (94%);

STATE: MASSACHUSETTS, USA (94%);

CITY: BOSTON, MA, USA (94%);

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