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Priest named in N.M. lawsuit

'70s molestation
of 2 boys charged

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A retired Catholic priest who has lived in Denver for several years was sued yesterday for allegedly molesting two young boys in Alamogordo, N.M., in the 1970s.

The priest, the Rev. David A. Holley, 65, was sued in state district court in Albuquerque by two of his alleged victims, Joseph A. Hafermann of Minnesota and Mark Sanchez of Albuquerque. The alleged molestations occurred in 1973 and 1974, when the two men were children in Alamogordo.

Also named in suit

Also named as defendants were the diocese of El Paso, Texas, which included Alamogordo, the diocese of Worcester, Mass., where Holley was ordained, and the Servants of the Paraclete, a New Mexico treatment center for priests with alcohol and sexual problems.

According to the lawsuit, Holley was a chaplain in Denver's St. Anthony Hospital system in 1987 and 1988, before retiring. He could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The alleged victims and their parents were parishioners in Alamogordo's St. Jude mission, where Holley was a priest.

'Repressed memories'

The suit alleges that "Holley repeatedly sexually molested" the boys, but they repressed their memories of the incidents until December 1991 "when publicity surrounding allegations of sexual abuse by other Catholic priests evoked their memories."

The lawsuit alleges that officials in the Worcester diocese sent Holley to the Paraclete center in 1971 after "he was discovered to be a pedophile." After his release, according to the suit, Holley was allowed to serve parishes in the El Paso diocese, including St. Jude.

The suit says Catholic officials in

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Defendant worked as Denver chaplain

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both Worcester and El Paso knew of Holley's history, but did nothing to prevent him from having contact with young boys or to warn others about his past.

The suit alleges that the two dioceses and the treatment center "negligently and recklessly continued to employ Holley in a position of trust and authority where he was able to commit wrongful and negligent acts against the plaintiffs."

Officials of the El Paso Diocese yesterday declined comment on the suit, saying they hadn't seen the document. But they said diocesan policy "is to deal with victims of sexual abuse with all reasonable means of pastoral care available."

Representatives of the Worcester Diocese and the Servants of the Paraclete did not return telephone calls.

Holley and Hafermann "have suffered and will continue to suffer severe emotional distress, embarrassment, humiliation and loss of self esteem," according to the suit.

According to the lawsuit, Holley came to Denver in 1987 and asked for credentials to serve as a chaplain in the St. Anthony Hospital System.

"We checked him out and found nothing" to indicate previous misconduct, said Bob Feeney, a spokesman for the Denver Archdiocese.

Officials at St. Anthony Hospital Central and St. Anthony Hospital North said yesterday they had no record of Holley's presence there. But the lawsuit says he worked as an assistant hospital chaplain for 11 months and then resigned.

The archdiocese then removed his faculties, meaning he could no longer serve as a priest. Feeney said the archdiocese hasn't had contact with Holley since 1988.

He said archdiocesan policy requires all employees to report any sexual misconduct that they know or have reason to believe, is happening. The archdiocese also has a policy of informing other dioceses when an inquiry is made, of the sexual misconduct of any priest.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.