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Flanagan believed teen

Former bishop says sex charge led to transfer

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WORCESTER — A complaint by an 18-year-old man about unwanted sexual advances led to the Rev. David A. Holley's removal from a Worcester church in 1968, former Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan said yesterday.

Holley was relieved of his duties at Our Lady of Fatima Church in August of that year and sent to the Marsalin Institute in Holliston for outpatient treatment, Flanagan said. He said the complaint was the diocese's first indication that Holley had a sexual problem, and the priest was immediately removed from contact with parishioners.

Holley, now 65, was recently convicted of raping boys in the 1970s in New Mexico, where he served after leaving Massachusetts. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester is charged in a civil suit by four men

who grew up in Central Massachusetts with covering up for Holley and moving him from parish to parish.

Flanagan said the 18-year-old's allegation was brought to him by an administrator at Doctors Hospital on Lincoln Street, which is now Ad-care Hospital. Holley initially denied the accusation, Flanagan said.

"We agreed the young man was telling the truth and Holley was not," he said.

Flanagan did not recall the man's name or the reason he was at the hospital.

Holley's removal from Our Lady of Fatima was the first step in a process that eventually sent him to a retreat in New Mexico, where he was to undergo treatment for pedophilia. But former members of Central Massachusetts parishes say he had been sexually abusing them as early as 1964, when one was as young as 11.



Flanagan

A lawsuit filed yesterday in Suffolk Superior Court alleges that in the year Holley was removed, he took 13-year-old Barry Navin to a church-run retreat and forced the boy to have oral sex with several unnamed priests. The plaintiffs in the suit allege that Holley molested them while serving at parishes in Boylston and Grafton. Navin, Paul F. Roughan, William Schultz and Philip Saviano are seeking unspecified damages from the Worcester Diocese, saying it failed to protect them.

Flanagan, who now lives at a retirement home on June Street, said he did not know about the alleged abuse because the four did not bring their complaints to him at the time.

"I have to feel sorry for them," Flanagan said. "I can understand how they wouldn't report it. I can understand little boys being too embarrassed to bring up these things."

He said that when the 18-year-old described advances by Holley, he believed the allegation because the man was sincere and had no motive for wanting to harm the

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Flanagan explains removal

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priest. Holley did not know the man before the hospital visit, Flanagan said.

The man did not describe the advances, Flanagan said, but was adamant that he did not want Holley to visit him again. The priest often visited patients at the hospital, he said.

Flanagan said he recalled that Monsignor Edmund G. Haddad was present during the conference with Holley's accuser. Haddad, who is also retired and lives in an apartment near Flanagan's, said he remembers the case, but was not at the discussion.

Haddad, the diocesan chancellor at the time, said that after the accusation was made, Holley wanted to transfer to another parish with a school. That request was denied because of concern about the children, Haddad said.

Flanagan said that when Holley went to Holliston, he was treated for several weeks by Dr. Jerome Hayden, a priest who also was a psychiatrist.

Hayden later recommended placing Holley in a residential treatment setting, and Flanagan sent him to Baltimore to the Seton Institute, a psychiatric hospital that has since closed. After several months there, Flanagan said, Holley was transferred in 1972 to a center run by a religious order called Servants of the Paraclete in

Jemez Springs, N.M.

Haddad, now 76, said he became pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church in Worcester in 1969 and lost track of Holley after that.

"You can't judge historic events by the standards of the day," Haddad said. He said the prevailing thought about sexual abuse was different in the 1960s.

"Dr. Hayden didn't look upon it as that dangerous to society," Haddad said. "So who was going to guide us?"

Flanagan, who retired in 1983, said he did not hear from Holley after the priest went west. He declined comment, citing the lawsuit, on what led to Holley's return to the church community in New Mexico, where he served as a priest from 1972 to 1976.

Holley pleaded guilty last month in New Mexico to molesting eight boys there during the 1970s. He is now being held without bail and could face sentences totaling 275 years in prison.

Bishop Timothy J. Harrington, the current head of the Worcester Diocese, did not respond to a request for a statement on the Holley case. But the Rev. John W. Barrett, the diocesan spokesman, said the church has always reacted to information about sexual abuse by priests.

"It's totally unfair to suggest that any bishop would know this sort of thing and permit it to continue,"

Barrett said. "Certainly no bishop or priest would permit anyone to molest a child."

Barrett said the tragedy for the victims and the accused priests is compounded by the damage done to the church and all the people who are devoted to working with youth.

"Suddenly we are tainted by this and it's simply not fair," Barrett said. "It's a human tendency that we can all be tarred by the same brush."