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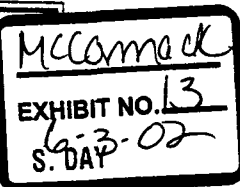
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McCormack regrets overlooking Rev. Shanley's deviant views

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Manchester Bishop John B. McCormack yesterday said he regrets not picking up on former Boston priest Paul R. Shanley's deviant views on adult-child sex, but didn't think Shanley meant what he said nor would ever act on it.

"I wish I did zero in on it more," McCormack said about a 1985 speech on homosexuality in which Shanley was quoted as saying children seduce adults into having sex with them.

"But, at the time, Paul was known as one who would push the envelope and kind of make statements that were in some ways extreme. But I never thought he believed it or he would practice it," McCormack added.

The bishop also called Shanley a "pretty sick guy" and said he was angry the priest "duped" him into believing he was out of money and taking on second jobs to support himself while on sick leave in southern California only to learn later that Shanley and another Boston priest co-owned a gay hotel in Palm Springs.

"I feel angry about it. I'm angry enough to feel that I was duped, if all this is true. I still find it hard to believe that they owned those hotels," McCormack told The Union Leader.

McCormack has come under increasing pressure to explain his role in the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston since last month's stunning revelations of Shanley's history as an alleged child rapist and molester who publicly advocated sex between men and boys.

As secretary of the Boston archdiocese's ministerial personnel office from 1984 to 1994, McCormack became Shanley's handler when the priest went on sick leave from a Newton, Mass., parish in 1990.

But McCormack reiterated yesterday that he never knew of child sexual abuse allegations against Shanley that date back to 1967 when he took over Shanley's case.

He also said he was unaware of the now 71-year-old priest's public advocacy of sex between men and boys even though court documents show that the Vatican inquired of Shanley's teachings on homosexuality as early as 1979.

While McCormack said he requested Shanley's confidential file from Bishop Robert Banks, then vicar for administration, he said the file he received did not include past sexual misconduct allegations.

Nor did it contain a 1979 article in which Shanley endorsed man-boy sex at a Boston conference that led to the formation of the North American Man Boy Love Association, he said.

Also missing was a 1977 letter from an upstate New York woman who quoted Shanley as saying he could "think of no sexual act that causes psychic damage — 'not even incest or bestiality.' "

"It was a shock to everybody . . . Why these files weren't there doesn't make sense," McCormack said of more than 800 documents in Shanley's personnel file obtained under court order last month by the attorney representing one of Shanley's alleged victims.

McCormack blamed the missing documents on an "unintegrated filing system" at the Boston archdiocese where various church officials dealt with Shanley during his 36 years in ministry.

"Many people would have intervened in Father Shanley's life," McCormack said, including cardinals, a pastor, the vicar for administration and himself as secretary for ministerial personnel.

"This is a terrible, embarrassing and tragic thing that we didn't have the information that, if we knew now, this never would have happened," McCormack, 66, said in his first interview since the file was made public at an April 8 press conference.

"All I can say is it will not happen (in New Hampshire). We want to make sure we have a filing system that is integrated that doesn't allow cases to fall through the cracks," added McCormack, who became the ninth bishop of New Hampshire in 1998.

Shanley officially retired in 1996 with at least 15 child sexual abuse allegations — including anal rape, oral sex and fondling — in his personnel file, attorneys representing one of his victims said. Another 11 complaints have been received since, the attorney said.

McCormack said Shanley's alleged sexual misconduct first became known to him in 1993 after he became the archdiocese's delegate for sexual misconduct. A former altar boy complained Shanley molested him when he was 15, he said.

McCormack said his first hint of Shanley's deviant sexual views came in 1985

when he was asked to respond to an upstate New York woman's letter summarizing a speech Shanley gave there on homosexuality.

The woman quoted Shanley as saying "when adults have sex with children, the children seduced them."

McCormack spoke with Shanley and concluded the woman "misunderstood him."

"Now that I look back on it, I wish I had picked up on that more. I wouldn't do that now, with the knowledge that I have," he said yesterday.

While Shanley worked on the fringes of ministry and often presented extreme views, McCormack said he didn't believe he would actually ever practice them.

"He was one who worked on the margins of pastoral life with the druggies, hippies, street people, the gay community," McCormack said.

Shanley went on sick leave from the Newton, Mass., parish in 1990 because of problems with his allergies and his refusal to take an oath to be faithful to church teachings then required by the Holy See, McCormack said.

He went to southern California where he had a friend, the Rev. John White, another Boston archdiocesan priest also on sick leave.

McCormack said his job was to handle Shanley's living expenses and bills and be the archdiocese's contact with him.

McCormack defended the warm, cordial tone he maintained in his numerous letters to Shanley through 1994. He said he has known Shanley since they attended seminary together and treated him as a "brother priest."

"I was still trying to be kind, but also was trying to carry out my role," he explained.

Saying both Shanley and White felt "marginalized," he suggested he visit them in Palm Springs in 1991.

"Shanley is a pretty sick guy. He felt persecuted by the archdiocese, not accepted, not supported. He felt unstable. He had all kinds of physical ailments. The man was pretty sick overall," McCormack said.

"I had a concern that they were out there by themselves. They were complaining about their relationship to the archdiocese. It was clear Shanley was not feeling well. My effort was to go out . . . to see if I could assess how they were," McCormack explained.

McCormack said the visit was an official one and that he stayed at a parish rectory in Palm Springs. Shanley was staying at St. Anne parish rectory in San Bernardino

and White was living on his own in Palm Springs, he said.

McCormack said it was only through recent media reports that he learned Shanley and White bought a gay-themed resort hotel in Palm Springs in December 1990.

Property records show they owned the four-room Cabana Club Resort and White was sole owner of a neighboring hotel, the Whispering Palms, which also catered to the gay community.

"I can't believe it and I'm surprised. I wonder where they got the money, honestly, because Shanley was always in dire need for money. I don't understand how he and White could own a gay motel," McCormack said.

In letter after letter to McCormack, a whining Shanley complained that the Boston archdiocese didn't send him enough money to meet his medical and housing bills. McCormack often responded that he would try to help him.

"If all that's true, (I feel) very much duped," McCormack said.

Further court documents released last week suggest Shanley may have tried to blackmail Cardinal Humberto Medeiros to keep the archbishop from removing him from his street ministry, according to Boston attorney Roderick MacLeish Jr., who represents the family of an alleged victim of Shanley's.

Noting he had a list of the theological "updating" at the Boston seminary, Shanley wrote Medeiros in 1979: "Were I to release this to the press you would have to fire another half dozen of your top priests since what they are saying is far more shocking than my poor offerings."

Asked if Shanley was trying to blackmail archdiocesan officials, McCormack said, "I don't know, but not me.

"What I would say about Paul is that Paul would always push the envelope and advocate the margins of causes," he explained.

"I'm sure Paul wasn't the easiest priest to manage because of his ministries and his advocacy. But I don't think people felt that he was acting on this. That's my sense because Medeiros was a very up-front, truthful man," he added.

McCormack also said he now questions his handling of a parent's complaint that the Rev. Joseph Birmingham was molesting children at St. James parish in Salem, Mass., in the 1960s.

McCormack had been a priest at the parish at the same time as Birmingham, who died in 1989. He told the parent who approached him about Birmingham to report it to the pastor.

But Birmingham was transferred to other parishes and was eventually made a pastor in 1985 after McCormack was secretary for ministerial personnel. Asked

why he didn't do anything to stop Birmingham then, McCormack said:

"I've asked myself that question. The one thing I can say is that I had thought he had stopped . . . his behavior or he wouldn't have continued that far," he said.

McCormack said he did confront Birmingham when he was secretary.

"I spoke to him about his past behavior and told him that I knew about it. And he told me that he was clean. That's the expression I remember," he added.

McCormack is a defendant in a civil suit in which 40 men allege Birmingham molested them as children.

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