

Man says aide to cardinal let abuse claim languish

By James L. Franklin
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One of the two delegates named by Cardinal Bernard F. Law to handle sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston apparently failed to relay allegations against a former Boston priest who has now been accused of sexually abusing boys in a California choir.

The complaint made in 1985 to Rev. John B. McCormack, secretary for ministerial personnel in the Boston archdiocese, involved Rev. Richard T. Coughlin, a Boston priest who moved to California in 1965.

In several interviews recently, [REDACTED], 45, of Eastham, stated that he had informed Father McCormack of being sexually abused by Father Coughlin numerous times over a four-year period beginning in 1958, when [REDACTED] was 9 years old.

The alleged assaults took place while Father Coughlin, who is now 68, was assigned to St. Patrick's parish in Stoneham, said [REDACTED] who works as a journalist for several weekly Cape Cod newspapers.

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██████████ said he decided to inform the church of the alleged assaults in 1985, months after he realized in the course of therapy that he had been abused as a child. ██████████ was referred to Father McCormack after approaching archdiocesan officials.

John B. Walsh, communications director for the Boston archdiocese, confirmed yesterday that Father McCormack met with ██████████ Nov. 15, 1985, and that Father McCormack had taken no action following the meeting.

Father McCormack was named in January by Cardinal Law as one of the two delegates responsible for investigating complaints in the archdiocese of sexual abuse involving church workers.

Father Coughlin, who served in parishes in Stoughton and Lynn for 12 years before moving to California in 1965, was suspended by the Orange, Calif., diocese Jan. 29, according to Msgr. John Urell, chancellor of the Orange diocese. Father Coughlin was removed because of allegations that he had abused four former members of All-American Boys Chorus in Costa Mesa, a group he founded in 1970.

██████████ was a fifth case also considered by the Orange diocese.

Msgr. Urell said yesterday that ██████████ complaint was among those reviewed by diocesan officials before suspending the priest.

Msgr. Urell said his diocese had not received any complaints about Father Coughlin from the Boston archdiocese.

██████████ said he brought the allegations against Father Coughlin on his own to the Orange diocese in a phone call around Dec. 10 last year. ██████████ said the Orange diocese was in an early stage of its own investigation of allegations against Father Coughlin, involving members of the boys' chorus, and his was the second complaint reviewed by the Orange diocese.

Walsh, the Boston archdiocese spokesman, first said no archdiocesan official would comment on the case because of its "pastoral sensitivity."

Later, after ██████████ gave the

archdiocese written permission to discuss his case, Walsh confirmed that Father McCormack had verified that he met with ██████████ in 1985 but added that four records don't turn up any proceedings from that meeting.

Asked why the archdiocese did not inform the Orange diocese of the allegations or take other action, Walsh said he could not discuss the case in any more detail because of the confidentiality required by abuse cases, which goes beyond any obligation to ██████████ himself.

"We certainly do not want to be in a position of trying to contradict or argue with Mr. ██████████ which comes out of our sincere pastoral concern for Mr. ██████████," Walsh said.

Walsh said the sexual abuse policy adopted by the archdiocese in January now provides that abuse complaints be passed to another diocese or to a religious order.

"We would take that initiative and inform the complainant that we had done so and also urge them to be in contact with the other diocese or order, as well," he said.

While Orange has suspended Father Coughlin, there have been no criminal charges brought as a result of the allegations. All of the abuse allegations in California involve events of at least 10 years ago, and it appears that the statute of limitations has expired in those cases.

Msgr. Urell said Father Coughlin has been suspended from public functioning as a priest. But he added that he knew of no civil or criminal proceedings against the priest.

██████████ believe the case would have been different if prompt action had been taken on his complaints. "If Boston had passed on what I told them in 1985 and the Orange Diocese had turned up some kids seven years ago, the charges would have been within the statute of limitations," he said.

Born June 13, 1924, in Boston, Father Coughlin prepared for the priesthood at St. John's Seminary in Brighton and was ordained in 1953. In California, he has served in parishes in the Los Angeles archdiocese and the Orange diocese, and taught part-time at a private high school, officials there said.

Last December, Father Coughlin and church officials in Orange, Calif., said, he saw Father McCormack in the Boston Archdiocese, again, after the Dec. 22 meeting.

Called, Father McCormack said he could not remember seeing him in 1985 and said there was no record of abuse complaints against Father Coughlin.

██████████ said he asked Father McCormack why the archdiocese had made no attempt to find out if there were other complaints about Father Coughlin during his time in Boston. "He told me that someone had not come forward in light of all the publicity over the Porter case. He took that as a sign they were dealing emotionally with the trauma," ██████████ man said.

Upset at the denial of a previous meeting, ██████████ from friends in whom he trusted the story of his abuse and wanted to get action by church officials. He first turned to a friend who had