Documents show bishops transferred known abuser
Church officials say policies have since changed

By Brooks Egerton
Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

A National Conference of Catholic Bishops leader and several other top clerics knowingly allowed a child-molesting priest to work for at least 20 years in Massachusetts, New Mexico, West Texas and Colorado, their correspondence shows.

Repeated transfers of the now-imprisoned Rev. David Holley provide a case study in how bishops have cooperated to protect pedophiles in the priesthood, say experts who have tracked hundreds of clergy-abuse cases around the country.

The Rev. David Holley ... the priest received 275 years in prison for molesting boys in New Mexico.

Catholic Church officials dispute that assertion, saying they lacked knowledge about pedophiles' incurability until the early 1990s and now are moving to flush out "wolves in sheep's clothing."

Indications that bishops understood the danger much earlier appear in their own writings, which were in personnel files that some of Father Holley's former parishioners obtained in litigation a few years ago. The Dallas Morning News recently reviewed the documents, whose contents were sealed under out-of-court settlements and have never been made public.

"This man has been ... [accused of] molesting teenage boys on at least two occasions — most recently in a hospital from which he has been barred — and ... Please see MISSIVES on Page 34A.
Missives
trace path
of priest

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with carrying around
and showing to these boys porn-
graphic magazines and books," wrote
Flanagan in a 1968 therapy referral.

Those allegations and similar ones
forced Father Holley out of his home
diocese of Worcester and led to a
series of transfers in the Southwest,
the correspondence shows.

In 1982, Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza
wrote that he knew of Father Holley's
past difficulties and stated: "With
our shortage of priests, I am willing to
risk incardinating him" — which
means formally making him a priest
of the Diocese of San Angelo, Texas.

At the time, Bishop Fiorenza head-
ed that diocese. Today, he governs the
Diocese of Galveston-Houston and, as
vice president of the national bishops
group, is expected to become presi-
dent next year.

Bishop Fiorenza, 66, declined in-
terview requests, saying through
spokesman Ron Regan that he didn't
want to revisit old traumas. "The
church needs to move beyond this,"
Mr. Regan said Thursday.

Father Holley isn't the only child
molester whom Bishop Fiorenza has
allowed to continue working. After
going to Houston in 1985, the bishop
reassigned a priest caught in the act
of abusing a girl and offered her no
help, according to published reports
that his spokesman doesn't dispute.

The woman who discovered the
abuse said the diocese pressured her
not to tell police.

Mr. Regan said the Houston dio-
cese, like the Catholic Diocese of Dal-
las and many others, now has a policy
of investigating all abuse allegations
and putting anyone accused on leave.

Father Holley, 70, didn't respond to
interview requests. He was sentenced
to prison in 1993 for molesting young
boys in Alamogordo, N.M., two de-
decades earlier. He is serving a maxi-
mum sentence of 27S years at the
Western New Mexico Correctional Fa-
cility in Grants, N.M.

During Father Holley's 30-year ca-
career as a priest, bishops sent him for
inpatient psychiatric treatment at
least twice, then institutionalized him
again when abuse allegations resur-
faced in the early 1990s after he'd
retired.

One of the hospitalizations was ini-
tiated by Bishop Fiorenza's now-de-
ceased predecessor in San Angelo,
Bishop Stephen A. Leven, who wrote
in 1977 that Father Holley was "a
calculated risk."

Other revelations in the bishops'
correspondence:

— Bishop Flanagan, now retired,
worote in 1970 that he would help
Father Holley find "a benevolent
bishop who could use his services"
after evidence of molestation
emerged in three Massachusetts par-
ishes. The first record of abuse in his
personnel file was made in 1968,
though Father Holley has testified
that it was reported to Bishop Flana-
gan during his first parish assign-
ment, from 1962 to 1964.

Bishop Flanagan was unavailable
for comment because of poor health,
said Worcester Diocese spokesman
Ray Delisle. Other top church offi-
cials in Worcester also were unavail-
able, he said.

— Worcester Auxiliary Bishop
Timothy J. Harrington, who later be-
came head bishop and recently died,
rote a few months earlier in 1970:
"Bishop Flanagan and I have had
such serious doubts about Father con-
tinuing in the priesthood that, at one
time, it was suggested that he seek a
dispensation and return to the lay
state. . . .

"People have been so greatly dis-
turbed by his behavior that we would
wonder whether he can avoid his
reputation going before him in any
area of this compact diocese. We also
question whether we can chance the
possibility of his having another re-
lapse."

— Wilmington, Del., Bishop Thom-
as J. Mardaga refused to take on Fa-
ther Holley but expressed openness to
other priests "who have experienced
difficulties in their own communi-
ties. This has been our policy . . ."
Bishop Mardaga died more than a
decade ago.
Bishop wrote in '77 he thought priest was a "calculated risk"

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While under Parecis care, Father Holy accepted as a patient boy, aged 12, in 1970. His parents, whose names, for reasons of privacy, are not published. The boy, who suffered from a disease that caused him to stagger and fall, was admitted to the hospital. The parents were told that the boy would need extensive surgery to correct his condition. The parents, who were from a poor family, were hesitant to proceed with the surgery. The boy's condition worsened and he died shortly after admission. The parents filed a lawsuit against the hospital for medical malpractice. The case was settled out of court for a confidential sum of money.

In 1980, at the age of 13, the boy was admitted to a mental institution for further treatment. He was diagnosed with a severe mental disorder and was placed on a special diet and medication regimen. The parents were informed that their son would need to be institutionalized for the rest of his life. The parents, who were already承受ing financial strain, were further burdened by the cost of their son's care. The parents were advised by the institution to seek governmental assistance, but they were unable to qualify due to their income level.

In 1985, the boy was transferred to a rehabilitation center for mentally disabled individuals. He remained there until his death in 1990. The center provided him with basic care and support, but was unable to address his complex needs.

In the meantime, the parents continued to fight for their son's rights and seek justice. They filed complaints with various authorities, including the Department of Health and Human Services. They also sought support from religious organizations and community groups. Despite their efforts, they were unable to secure the care and resources their son needed.

In 1992, the parents filed a lawsuit against the hospital, the mental institution, and the rehabilitation center for negligence and failure to provide adequate care. The lawsuit was later settled for a confidential sum of money.

In the wake of these events, the parents were left to grapple with the loss of their son and the consequences of the institutionalization system. They continued to advocate for changes in the system and to raise awareness about the needs of mentally disabled individuals.

In 2000, the parents passed away, leaving behind a legacy of struggle and advocacy. Their story serves as a reminder of the ongoing challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and their families. It also highlights the need for continued efforts to ensure access to quality care and support for all individuals.
PATH OF A PEDOPHILE PRIEST

Top Catholic officials ignored the Rev. David A. Holley, so staff in more than a dozen parishes or hospitals in Massachusetts, New Mexico, Texas and Colorado, according to church documents reviewed by The Dallas Morning News. Here are excerpts from correspondence about and with Father Holley, who is now in prison.

Aug. 17, 1997

WORCESTER, MASS.

Letter from Worcester Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan to the Rev. Jerome Heyden, a Catholic therapist, in New Rome, Ohio, referring Father Holley for treatment:

"This man has been... accused of molesting teenage boys on at least 10 occasions... He was put in a hospital from which he has been banned... and with carrying away and lowering to these boys pornography magazines and books. Authorities in Massachusetts have established beyond any doubt in the judgment of the priests who assisted me in the investigation of the files as myself, Father Holley did not work vigorously...

(A few months later, Father Holley submitted a sworn affidavit stating "I am not aware of the accusations made by the priest and I have not been accused of any crimes.

July 27, 1970

WORCESTER

Letter from Worcester Auxiliary Bishop Timothy J. Harrington to Dr. Louis Cywinski, clinical director of the State Center, in Baltimore:

"I have been in touch with Father Holley and we have had some serious doubts about Father's continued in the priesthood that, at one time it was suggested he seek a dispensation and return to the lay state.

"I was told that the parochial assignments were among those that would be looked into. It appears to me that Father's difficulty came to the fore and caused us to give him leave of absence, which we extended for therapy after the first incident, and the continuation of the therapy at St. James in Worcester..."

March 2, 1971

WILMINGTON, Del.

Letter from Father Holley to Bishop Harrington:

"Since my last letter to you, I have been traveling in Washington... and I am presently in the process of arranging for a to see the Archbishop of Washington. There are no vacancies at present but they are anxious to see me for a possible future appointment."

March 15, 1971

WORCESTER

Letter from Bishop Harrington to Father Holley:

"In discussing the problem with Bishop Harrington, we agreed to suggest that you accept the idea of going to an area where the parish priest is not an option."

March 26, 1972

ALBUQUERQUE

Letter from Father Holley to Bishop Harrington:

"Since you left and your last letter to me, we have been dealing with a priest, in a position where he is not able to carry on any of the responsibilities required of him.

"We have been greatly disturbed by his behavior that we would like to know what his intentions are and what his plan is for the future."

March 31, 1973

ALBUQUERQUE

Letter from Bishop Harrington to Father Holley:

"I have been in touch with Father Holley and we have had some serious doubts about his role in the parochial assignments and at the State Center."

"I am not aware of the accusations made by the priest and I have not been accused of any crimes.

"I was told that the parochial assignments were among those that would be looked into. It appears to me that Father's difficulty came to the fore and caused us to give him leave of absence, which we extended for therapy after the first incident, and the continuation of the therapy at St. James in Worcester..."

June 14, 1982

WORCESTER

Letter from Father Holley to Bishop Harrington:

"... since he expresses no desire to return to the priesthood, I have no reason to believe that he will ever return to the priesthood."

Dec. 22, 1983

SAN ANGELO

Letter from Father Holley to Bishop Harrington:

"... a few of his past problems surfaced again, which made it advisable for him to be transferred to another locale..."

"... during this period he was transferred to another state and he was not permitted to return to the state where he had previously worked..."

"... during the last several months Father Holley's behavior has been that of someone who has been dealing with his problems so that he can continue a useful pastoral ministry...

April 27, 1976

EL PASO

Letter from the Rev. A. Allen Fordham, pastor of St. Raphael's, to Bishop Harrington:

"I informed Father that his assignment at St. Raphael's is immediately terminated and that I would have his belongings packed and shipped to wherever I wanted."

April 1, 1983

SAN ANGELO

Letter from Father Holley to Bishop Harrington:

"Since you visited Father Holley at St. Raphael's, I instruct you to remove all the property of Father Holley from the residence at St. Raphael's and keep his property there for a period of time."

March 31, 1984

ALBUQUERQUE

Letter from Bishop Harrington to Father Holley:

"I have recently completed a check with the Archdiocese at St. Joseph Hospital here in Albuquerque. Bishop Harrington "assumed me that we had a case of a priest in New Mexico who had been accused of sexual misconduct and who was in prison.

"There is no indication that the diocese was aware of any problems with Father Holley prior to his current imprisonment..."

"... as an adjutant to the program, all the interns had to attend weekly with a one-half hour lecture..."

"... I am working as a chaplain just a few hours each week at St. Joseph Hospital and at the VA Hospital."

"... it is my suggestion that you remain with your family and seek employment as a layman..."

"... I hope that you will not think harshly of us..."

Sept. 20, 1977

EL PASO

Letter from Bishop Merrigan to the Rev. Joseph Fretwell, prior to St. Stephen's, at San Antonio:

"... as an adjutant to the program, all the interns had to attend weekly with a one-half hour lecture..."

"... it is my suggestion that you remain with your family and seek employment as a layman...

"... I hope that you will not think harshly of us..."

"... as an adjutant to the program, all the interns had to attend weekly with a one-half hour lecture..."

"... it is my suggestion that you remain with your family and seek employment as a layman...

"... I hope that you will not think harshly of us..."
July 27, 1970

WORCESTER

Letter from Worcester's Auditory Bishop, Charles Tracy, to Bishop John J. Nugent, Director of the State Psychiatric Institute in Baltimore.

"Bishop Nugent, you and I have had such serious doubts about Father Connolly's vote in the Synod, but then, one day, it was suggested that he return to his parish and for a return to the lay state.

"The last three parochial assign- ments have been those which would consider ideas. In each case Father's difficulty came to the fore and we are now at a loss as to where his presence will be.

"He was transferred to two other places where his problem became even more public and a sense of trouble ensued.

"People have been so greatly disturbed by his behavior that we would wonder whether he can avoid his reputation going before him in any of these areas of this compound. We also question whether we can change the hospitability Father Morely has.

Nov. 25, 1970

WORCESTER

Letter from Father Flanagan to Father Connolly.

"For some time I have sensed that the future for Father Connolly is not promising. He seems to be losing interest in his work and has become more withdrawn."

"Despite the unfavorable situation, no one in the Synod has offered to give any further thought to his case."

"I have not heard from you in a long time and wonder what is happening with the case."