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## Easton priest on leave has history working with Southcoast students

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Posted Nov 12, 2019 at 4:13 PM

Updated Nov 12, 2019 at 4:15 PM

Father Richard E. Degagne, one of two Roman Catholic priests put on administrative leave earlier this month for alleged misconduct, has a history of working with students on the Southcoast.

According to the June 1982 edition of the Fall River Diocese's newspaper The Anchor, Degagne belonged to St. Anne's parish in Fall River and "taught music on the junior high school level for two years before entering studies for the priesthood."

The September 1994 edition of the paper expanded on Degagne's background, saying he attended St. Anne's School and BMC Durfee High School, both in Fall River, and earned a bachelor's degree in music education at Lowell University. It specifically said Degagne taught in Fall River.

In the statement announcing the Fall River Diocese's decision to put two priests on leave, Director of Communications John Kearns said, "The misconduct alleged of Fr. Degagne is said to have occurred before he was a priest."

When asked whether the diocese knew of his alleged misconduct before Degagne became a priest in 1982, Kearns said the alleged misconduct "was not brought to the attention of the Diocese until years later."

According to Kearns, Degagne's first assignment as a priest was as a parochial vicar at Holy Name Parish in Fall River, which has an associated Pre-K to Grade 8 Holy Name School.

In 1986 he was transferred to St. Anthony of Padua Parish in New Bedford, which at the time had an associated Kindergarten through Grade 8 school, which later closed in 2011. The building now houses Global Learning Charter School.

The year he was transferred to St. Anthony's, Degagne attended a three-day Diocesan Youth Ministry planning conference at Cathedral Camp in East Freetown, according to the December 1986 edition of The Anchor.

The goal of the conference was to help develop a parish-based diocesan youth ministry program.

According to the June 1991 edition of the diocesan newspaper, Degagne worked directly with the students at St. Anthony of Padua School.

"Directed by Father Degagne, the St. Anthony's students rendered outstanding versions of several Broadway musical selections that were sung by children," an article entitled 'Singing priests, kids rated standing O' read.

While he was at St. Anthony's, according to the September 1994 Anchor, Degagne also acted as a chaplain at Southeastern Massachusetts University, the present-day University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

In 1991, Degagne was transferred to Notre Dame Parish in Fall River, which also had an associated school, Notre Dame de Lourdes School.

The caption of a photo in the April 1992 edition of the diocesan newspaper read, "Notre Dame schoolchildren venerate cross during prayer service conducted by Rev. Richard Degagne, parochial vicar."

Following Notre Dame, Degagne was assigned to parishes in North Attleboro, Taunton, East Freetown, and Easton. The church in East Freetown, St. John Neumann Parish, is on the grounds of a Cathedral Camp that serves children ages 4 - 14, according to its website.

Over the course of his tenure as a priest, Degagne has received honors.

According to the diocese website, Degagne was named Dean of the Taunton district, which means the bishop appointed Degagne to assist him in the promotion of coordination of apostolic and pastoral activity in that area. There are 5 deans within the Fall River Diocese.

In 2011, Degagne was awarded a Clergy Renewal Program Grant from the Lilly Endowment, according to the October 2011 edition of The Anchor, which allowed him to take a six-month sabbatical through "France, Italy, and the Holy

Land.”

“The funds offset the expenses incurred by my parish for the sabbatical. It also greatly reduced my out-of-pocket expenses for personal travel and activities not provided by the diocese or the parish,” Degagne told The Anchor.

Degagne was most recently assigned to Immaculate Conception Parish in Easton when he was placed on administrative leave.

The decision to investigate Degagne and Father Daniel Lacroix of St. Mary, Our Lady of Fatima and St. Joseph-St. Therese parishes in the North End, for alleged misconduct came as the Fall River Diocese is developing a list of clergy against whom a credible allegation of abuse of a minor has been made in the past, Kearns said.

As a result of information gathered in the course of the external review of our priests’ files, Kearns said, it was determined that further investigation of the alleged misconduct is required for both Degagne and Lacroix.

While the priests are on leave they are not allowed to stay on parish affiliated property, but there are provisions for their compensation while they are on leave, according to Kearns.