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Cardinal Francis George

Cardinal removes another priest

Pastor not monitored for year after allegation

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Losing confidence in a monitoring program they have relied on to safeguard children, Chicago Catholic Archdiocese officials have removed from ministry a priest they were keeping under supervision while they try to determine if he abused two young girls decades ago.

Officials also acknowledged that the south suburban priest was not assigned a monitor until a year after the archdiocese first received an abuse allegation against him in March 2004. A spokesman said he could not explain the lengthy delay.

Cardinal Francis George ordered the removal of the pastor of Holy Ghost Catholic Church in South Holland after an emotional meeting this week with St. Agatha parishioners, who voiced outrage that for months they had not known about allegations against their own pastor, Rev. Daniel McCormack.

McCormack also had been placed under monitoring because of an abuse allegation, though his flock did not know that until he was arrested last month. On Wednesday, prosecutors added a third count of ag-

PRIESTS: Allegations over incidents 35 years ago

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gravated criminal sexual abuse to the charges against McCormack, and law enforcement sources would not say whether the abuse occurred while he was being monitored.

George said archdiocesan officials must look for ways to discreetly take accused priests out of the pulpit even before abuse allegations are found to be credible, said spokesman Jim Dwyer.

"We need to examine and adapt our policies... [to] withdraw the priest temporarily in a nonjudgmental fashion until the information is absorbed better and the case is resolved," Dwyer said Wednesday. "It will be a better situation for the priest and the parish if we change our policy."

The archdiocese said it has received two allegations that the pastor of Holy Ghost, 700 E. 170th St. in South Holland, abused two girls while serving at St. John De La Salle Catholic Church, 10205 S. King Drive in Chicago, more than 35 years ago.

The Tribune is not naming the priest, who is 65, because no criminal charges or lawsuits have been filed and the archdiocese has not yet determined if the allegations against him are credible.

Dwyer said the first allegation against the priest was reported to the archdiocese in March 2004, and a monitor was assigned in March 2005. Dwyer said he could not explain the delay.

According to national guidelines drafted by American bishops in 2002, if a priest has a credible allegation of abuse against him, he must be removed from ministry. But the guidelines leave it up to the dioceses to determine how to treat priests who are under investigation.

In Chicago, when the archdi-

ocese receives an abuse allegation, the claims are investigated by an independent review board that determines whether the accusations are credible and then makes a recommendation to the cardinal about what action should be taken. It is unclear how many priests have been assigned a monitor since 2002, Dwyer said.

Church officials had appointed a fellow priest to monitor McCormack in August, when the first abuse allegation surfaced. He was arrested Jan. 20 after a second accuser came forward and subsequently was charged with two counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse.

The charge filed Wednesday involved several alleged incidents with a third boy in the rectory of St. Agatha, law enforcement sources said.

Church officials said McCormack was not removed from ministry because the archdiocese had not yet received a firsthand allegation. In the meantime, McCormack was told not to be alone with minors and the archdiocese's vicar for priests asked a peer to "monitor" him.

George asked his staff this week if any circumstances similar to McCormack's monitoring arrangement existed, Dwyer said. When told of the Holy Ghost pastor, the cardinal ordered him to be removed.

"The cardinal has really been reflecting about this ever since he's gotten back—[how] to effect some kind of nonjudgmental way so we don't put ourselves, the parish, and the priest in this kind of situation again," Dwyer said. "He knew there was one more priest still in ministry. He felt [removing him] was the prudent thing to do."

George had approved the monitoring arrangement at Holy Ghost a year ago, Dwyer said.

Jeff Anderson, a St. Paul attorney who represents a number of clergy sexual abuse survivors, said he has been urging the archdiocese to remove the south suburban priest for almost two years. He represents the two alleged victims of the priest, both women in their 40s.

"They assured me that the decision was just around the corner," Anderson said. "That they were processing this and it would be forthcoming. I let them

It will be a question of professional responsibility and the parish if we change our policy.

—Archdiocese spokesman Jim Dwyer

lead—and now I believe misled us to this point in time. It was with the McCormack situation coming to light that I realized this is the last straw. We couldn't trust the process and I'm sorry that I did."

One of the women spoke publicly Wednesday, saying the priest had intercourse with her in the lower level of the church for three years beginning when she was 8.

"I heard on the news that a priest had been removed and I was hopeful and thrilled," said the woman, who asked that her name not be used. "I feel like a million-ton weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I'm incredibly relieved."

Ordained in 1966, the priest served at St. John De La Salle from 1967 to 1973; Our Lady of the Ridge, in Chicago Ridge, from 1974 to 1976; St. Joseph and St. Anne from 1977 to 1978; and St. Christina from 1979 to 1980. He returned to St. John De La Salle in 1981 and stayed until 1989. He moved to St. Agnes in 1990 and 1991; Our Lady of Fatima in 1992 through 1997. He has been at Holy Ghost in South Holland ever since.

As news of the priest's sudden removal trickled out through the media, parishioners reacted with surprise but said they still trusted the archdiocese to handle the situation correctly.

"People don't think that it's going to happen to their own friends and loved ones," said Tom Shesek, 49, a parishioner at Holy Ghost for about 20 years. "There are other people in power in the church that are handling this thing the way they've been doing it. My only opinion is if there's any truth to be unveiled or revealed that it happens as soon as can be."

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