

O'Fallon nun faced abuse complaint at Louisiana school

Barred from work with kids in 1979

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O'FALLON — A nun who lost her job at a Catholic middle school in Louisiana 23 years ago because of complaints she sexually molested a 12-year-old girl has been living quietly in O'Fallon, where she sometimes speaks at church gatherings.

The head of the religious order of which she is still a member said that local church officials were not told of the complaints of sexual conduct that barred her from contact with children.

Sister Cheryl Porte, a nun of the New Orleans-based Marianites of the Holy Cross, works as an instructor of theology in the undergraduate program at St. Louis University. She is on leave from her teaching job for a month.

Porte, 51, of 827 White Oak Lane, O'Fallon, was dismissed from Opelousas Middle School near Lafayette, La., in 1979 after complaints that she had a two-year sexual relationship with a female child.

"It was inappropriate sexual behavior," Sister Mary Kay Kinberger, congregational leader of the order, said during an inter-

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Sister Mary Kay Kinberger
congregational leader

view Friday.

Porte was sent to the order's provincial house in New Orleans for counseling, which Kinberger said she received. She lived there until 1985.

"There have been no other allegations," Kinberger said.

After a two-year stint as an administrative assistant for the diocese in Charlotte, N.C., Porte was transferred back to the provincial house where she stayed until applying to the doctoral program at St. Louis University in 1992.

Asked whether the Marianites informed the university or officials of the Archdiocese of St. Louis or the Diocese of Belleville of the reasons for Porte's dismissal as a teacher,

Please see **NUN, 2A**

NUN

Continued from Page 1A

Kinberger replied: "They would not have been notified at that time. If something like that happened today, I think everything is different today. We would notify."

The Rev. William Hitpas, pastor of St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church in O'Fallon, said Porte occasionally is the guest speaker at adult religious seminars, but has no other duties at the church. Porte is listed on the St. Nicholas Web site.

The alleged improper sexual relationship was outlined in detail in an Aug. 7 cover story in the Louisiana weekly newspaper, The Times of Acadiana, which reported the victim's name, Myra Hidalgo, 36, now of New Orleans. Hidalgo could not be reached.

Kinberger confirmed that Hidalgo was the victim in the complaints brought against Porte.

"We weren't going to make it public. She chose to make it public," Kinberger said.

The Louisiana newspaper reported that Hidalgo said Porte talked to her about pop music, left her personal notes and gifts at school, and then often took her to a residence where she said the sexual abuse occurred.

Hidalgo also told the newspaper that after her contact with Porte ended, her own life became unmanageable with the suicide of an older sister, the heart attack death of her mother and the gunshot suicide of her father. The newspaper story reports that Hidalgo tried suicide herself three times, including a final, near-fatal attempt that involved drinking a bottle of pesticide.