

Fugitive priest captured on sex charges

3 boys in Bay Co. reported as victims

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Catholic priest sought by authorities for more than seven years in several child sex cases was captured in Colombia and will be returned to Michigan to face trial, authorities said Thursday.

Colombian police arrested John Steven Rabideau, 44, Saturday when he tried to enter the country from Ecuador. He will be tried on charges that he had sexual contact with three boys from ages 6 to 14 in Williams Township in 1985 and 1987, said Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran.

The youths, who are now adults, reported the incidents in 1998, Sheeran said.

Rabideau, reached Thursday by phone at the Miami-Dade County Jail in Florida, declined comment on the charges.

"I probably shouldn't talk to you until I talk to a lawyer," he said.

Sheeran said Rabideau has been charged in warrants with one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, which carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. He also faces six counts of second-degree crimi-

nal sexual conduct, which involves touching. Each second-degree charge has a maximum penalty of 15 years.

"The victims are of course older now, and they certainly remember the events and are willing to testify," Sheeran said. "I'm very proud of them for having the courage to come forward when they did."

Sheeran said Michigan State Police may bring Rabideau back to Bay County, about 115 miles northwest of Detroit, as early as today.

Sheeran said Rabideau was visiting the same house as the victims, but he would not say whether they are related.

Rabideau is from the Bay City area and was returning from his studies in Boston and Rome. The visits had nothing to do with his duties as a priest, Sheeran said. Rabideau was never a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw, which includes Bay County, said diocese spokeswoman Cathy Haven.

Police began their investigation after the victims filed complaints, and authorities issued a warrant for Rabideau's arrest in 1998. Rabideau had been considered a fugitive since that time.



John Steven Rabideau at the Miami-Dade County Jail in Florida after his capture in Colombia. A warrant went out on him in 1998.

Sheeran said police narrowly missed capturing him several times in the Philippines, where authorities have determined that he served as a priest in 2004.

Rabideau was caught at a border crossing on the Rumi-chaca Bridge, said Oscar Galvis, a spokesman for Colombia's secret police.

Interpol had earlier issued an international wanted persons notice, or Red Notice, on the priest, which led to his arrest.

"When he presented his papers, the Red Notice came up immediately. So we arrested him, took him to Bogota and turned him in to U.S. authorities," Galvis said Thursday.

Rabideau was enrolled in the seminary at the Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Boston at the time of the reported offenses and was studying in Rome, said James G. Reardon Jr., a Worcester, Mass., attorney representing the organization. Rabideau was allowed to return

home during the summer, Reardon said.

Rabideau's authority to be engaged in public ministry as a priest of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary was suspended in 1992, the group said in a statement.

He fled the order in 1996 and was dismissed from it in 1997 after refusing to obey directions from his superiors, the statement said. There were no criminal or civil actions pending against him when he left, the statement said.

The Oblates of the Virgin Mary trains missionary priests who can be assigned anywhere they are needed, including parishes, although they don't have their own diocese or parishes, Reardon said.

Rabideau was ordained toward the end of 1990 and served as a priest until his suspension in 1992, Reardon said. He would not say where Rabideau had been assigned before the suspension.

"Now that there's a criminal case pending, I wouldn't be comfortable discussing the details of his service," Reardon said.