

Investigation under way on sex allegation against priest

By DAVE DALEY
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A retired Sauk Centre area Roman Catholic priest allegedly sexually abused a 31-year-old retarded Waite Park man last summer in an incident that is being investigated by local authorities, the Times has learned.

The priest, the Rev. Raoul Gauthier, long-time chaplain at St. Michael's Hospital in Sauk Centre, has since left the country and has been unavailable to local authorities.

Stearns County Attorney Roger Van Heel Wednesday confirmed that his office is investigating allegations against Gauthier but declined to reveal specific details.

Van Heel said that police reports on the incident were being reviewed and charges were likely, perhaps as early as next week.

Gauthier, 76, allegedly picked up the retarded man on Aug. 18 at a Waite Park business where the man works. Gauthier then drove the man to a parking lot in the city where the priest allegedly unzipped the man's pants and masturbated him with his hand, according to sources close to the investigation.

No other sexual contact between the priest and the man apparently was made, the sources said.

Gauthier apparently first met the man while doing part-time parish work in the Sauk Centre area where the man had lived, sources said.

The retarded man got into Gauthier's car at the Waite Park business because "he trusted him," one source said. The retarded man, whose name has not been disclosed, now lives in a group home for the mentally retarded in the St. Cloud area. The man apparently was not completely aware of the nature of the sexual act allegedly performed by Gauthier, sources said. Through conversations with the owner of the Waite Park business, shortly after the incident, however, the man became aware of what had allegedly happened and has since required some counseling by social workers, sources say.

"He was pretty bad off because of it," one source said. The man is said to have a very low IQ but is capable of carrying out menial tasks.

The Waite Park Police Department began investigating the incident Sept. 1 when the retarded man's employer filed a complaint with the department.

A statement was taken from Gauthier in which the priest admitted he had masturbated the man, sources say. However, when police tried contacting Gauthier about two weeks later for further interviews, they discovered he had left the United States for Canada. Gauthier is a former French-Canadian citizen who was born in Quebec.

Gauthier had told associates that he would be in Canada visiting a brother in Saskatchewan who is dying, the sources said.

Gauthier is now living in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, the Times has learned.

Although Gauthier's move out of the country hampered the police investigation, additional information needed by authorities on the inci-

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ment finished its investigation Monday.

Waite Park Police Chief Ken Dickinson, who headed his department's investigation, declined Wednesday to provide any official details. "Because of what's involved, I'm not going to say anything," Dickinson said.

Other authorities close to the investigation also declined to comment, saying any comment would be inappropriate while charges are pending.

"It's been kept pretty quiet," one source said. "Anytime anything like this happens, it's pretty shocking."

The investigation has not been conducted any differently than any other police investigation even though a Catholic priest is involved, sources say. "They're no different than anyone else," one source close to the investigation said.

Gauthier has no known record of any similar behavior, sources say.

A Sauk Centre priest who is a close friend of Gauthier's said today he was shocked when he heard of the allegations. The priest described Gauthier as a friendly, gregarious man "who was really concerned about his people."

Local church officials apparently were aware of the police investigation, sources said. Gauthier freely offered the one statement he gave to the police and did not have a lawyer present during the interview, the sources said.

Gauthier, who was born in Tingwick, Quebec, on June 9, 1903, had been chaplain at St. Michael's Hospital in Sauk Centre since 1952, according to records kept by the St. Cloud Catholic Diocese.

The hospital was sold to the city of Sauk Centre in 1971 but Gauthier stayed on for a time in his capacity as chaplain, according to hospital officials.

In recent years he has lived at the Riverview Manor nursing home in Sauk Centre, where he also carried out chaplain's duties.

Gauthier, who was ordained in 1930, celebrated Mass both at the hospital and the nursing home and performed other priestly duties at parishes in the Sauk Centre area when needed.

After ordination, Gauthier worked as an assistant pastor, a pastor and as a chaplain in various hospitals. He also was co-editor of a French-language newspaper in Can-

dent was obtained by other means, 1 sources say.	ada, according to records.
The Waite Park Police Depart- c	Gauthier was officially certified a
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	Dec. 1, 1962.

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