

Priest quits in sex abuse case

1st in Bridgeport diocese to voluntarily surrender cleric's role

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A Roman Catholic priest accused of sexually molesting boys in the 1970s, '80s and early '90s has agreed to leave the priesthood.

Martin J. Federici, suspended in 1996 after lawsuits naming him were filed against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport, was in clerical terminology "voluntarily laicized," a diocese spokesman confirmed Tuesday.

Federici is one of 20 priests in the diocese suspended after allegations were made that they had molested children. But he is the first to voluntarily give up the priesthood.

"This was a request by Martin Federici," said Joseph McAleer, spokesman for the Bridgeport diocese.

"With this laicization, Mr. Federici has been dismissed from the clerical state; all conditions of his sacred ordination as a priest have now been lifted," he said.

Under the church's laicization process, Federici made the request to leave the priesthood, which was forwarded to the Vatican. McAleer said the request was approved by the pope. Federici can no longer celebrate Mass, even privately. He also cannot hold any office in the Catholic church and is no longer required to be celibate, McAleer said. And the diocese no longer has an obligation to support him.

"The laicization of Martin Federici is certainly welcomed, but decades too late," said Bridgeport lawyer Cindy Robinson, whose firm, Tremont and Sheldon, represents more than three dozen people who claim they were abused by priests in the Bridgeport diocese, including Federici.

"Federici used the priesthood to cause much human suffering and victimization of children," Robinson said.

Sources said other suspended priests have been approached by diocesan officials about taking the same route from the clergy as Federici, but have refused.

McAleer wouldn't comment on that. "It is important to remind people that Bishop [William] Lori's pledge stands firm: No priest or deacon in active ministry in the Diocese of Bridgeport poses a threat of any kind to any person, young or old," he said.

According to sealed documents obtained by the Connecticut Post, Federici in 1968 was picked up by Westport police for allegedly molesting a boy in his car. Police didn't arrest him, but reported the incident to the diocese.

In 1971, after Federici was moved to St. Ambrose Church in Bridgeport, he was accused of molesting another boy. The boy's parents complained about Federici to the pastor, according to the documents.

Federici in November 1978 saw a psychologist, who reported to the diocese that Federici had "poor contact with reality ... the situation is not going to get better. He needs to be watched over and cared for like a child," the documents state.

But in 1983, Federici was transferred by the diocese to St. Joseph's Church in Shelton, where he was accused of sexually assaulting a young boy. The documents show the boy's parents reported the abuse to Monsignor Andrew Cusack.

Subsequently, Federici was transferred in 1984 to St. Edward the Confessor Church in New Fairfield. And in 1985, the diocese assigned him to St. Matthew's Parish in Norwalk. There, according to the documents, Federici rolled up phone bills by calling sex hot lines.

In 1989, Federici was assigned to Kolbe-Cathedral High School in Bridgeport, and two years later, an abuse victim advocate at a rape crisis center reported to the diocese that Federici had approached a young man during a weekend religious retreat, the documents state.

In 1996, he was accused in lawsuits filed against the diocese of abusing a 12-year-old boy in the confessional of St. Joseph's Church in Shelton in 1981; forcing a 16-year-old boy to perform sexual acts on him also in the confessional at St. Joseph's; and molesting a 13-year-old Bridgeport paperboy. In 1999, a Norwalk teenager claimed in a lawsuit that Federici forced him to watch as the priest masturbated at All-Saint's Catholic School in Norwalk in 1993.

The suit regarding the 16-year-old was settled by the diocese in 1999 for an undisclosed amount. The others were included in a \$15 million settlement of claims by 26 people against six diocesan priests in March 2001.