

Priest Retired After Utah Parents Say He Fondled Son, August 21, 1993

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By Stephen Hunt
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A former Ogden priest accused of inappropriately touching a 14-year-old boy in 1989 has been retired, say Catholic officials.

"It was a good opportunity to see that churches can act responsibly to respond to these concerns," said the Rev. Robert J. Bussen, Vicar General, Diocese of Salt Lake City.

The allegations against Jesuit priest Ray Devlin — former track coach and Latin teacher at Ogden's St. Joseph High School — are not new. They were brought in January 1990. But the family agreed to remain silent if Father Devlin received counseling and was removed from church activities involving children.

The victim accused Father Devlin of rubbing his arm, leg and buttocks while attending a December 1989 track clinic in California. The boy said he awoke to find Father Devlin fondling him.

The boy fled. Father Devlin claimed his actions were "sensuous not sexual," said the victim's father.

The priest, according to the victim, talked about killing himself and beat himself with his belt. Then he urged the teen-ager not to tell anyone or it could hurt the priest, high school and church.

But the boy did tell. And Utah church officials acted quickly. Father Devlin was sent to Jesuit headquarters in Los Gatos, Calif., where he underwent three months of counseling.

The victim also received coun-

seling through the church, and his family was assured Father Devlin would not have access to minors.

But last month, the victim's family learned the priest was serving in a Nevada parish, in which he had contact with youths, at the St. Mary in the Mountains Catholic Church, Virginia City.

In a letter to church leaders, the boy's father wrote: "We were stunned to think that the Catholic Church and the Jesuits had gone back on their word."

The family went public.

"We have no proof that the Jesuits will not assign Father Devlin out to another unsuspecting diocese and parish," the boy's father wrote to *The Salt Lake Tribune*. "It is our hope that the press will publish this information so Catholics will be aware if Father Ray Devlin is assigned to their parish."

The Utah weekly newspaper, *Intermountain Catholic*, also printed a story in Friday's edition.

In a written statement, Bishop William K. Weigand said:

"In adherence to the diocesan policy on child abuse, upon notification of the incident, the Diocese of Salt Lake City and St. Joseph's Catholic High School immediately placed Fr. Devlin on administrative leave pending further investigation . . .

"The Diocese worked closely with [the boy's parents] in seeking a full resolution to this matter."

Nevada church officials say they did not know of the allegations. They acted promptly when

the boy's father contacted them.

Father Devlin, in his early 70s, was recalled to Jesuit Provincial offices in California and assigned to a Jesuit retirement community. "He will not be permitted to engage in any pastoral ministry for the foreseeable future," according to Jesuit leaders.

Said Father Bussen of the Salt Lake City diocese: "We were not aware he was assigned to Nevada, and they were not aware of the problems here."

But while Nevada church leaders may have been unaware of Father Devlin's problems, Jesuit provincial superior, the Rev. Paul Belcher, knew of the allegations, said the victim's father.

Father Belcher, who retired Aug. 1 and is out of the country, allowed Father Devlin to return to church service.

Father Bussen said Father Devlin has never admitted to the allegations. But church policy dictates that a strong allegation is enough to warrant dismissal.

"Some might suggest that such strong responses are unfair to priests and sisters," he said.

"... Others would say that under such policies, religious leaders are presumed guilty unless they can prove their innocence.

"Yet our people have a right to presume that their religious leaders will not harm them. They have a right to presume that their children are safe in our hands. We hold a sacred trust. That trust must remain unshaken. If that makes us vulnerable as priest and sister, so be it."