

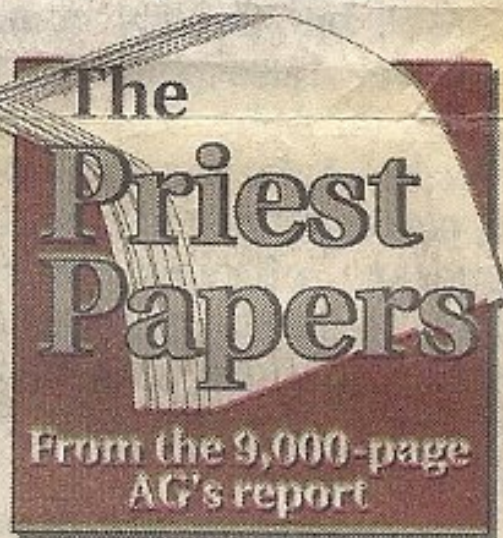
Aube files show diocese failed to act

By SEAN MURPHY
Democrat Staff Writer

Paul Aube told his church he had a problem. He liked young boys. He told his pastor and his bishop, but they didn't take the troubled priest out of the ministry until after he had amassed a list of a half a dozen victims of sexual assaults.

Internal church documents and transcripts of investigative interviews from the New Hampshire attorney general's office offer what appears to be compelling evidence of a former Rochester priest's pattern of sexual abuse of minors.

Almost running parallel to Paul L. Aube's admitted pattern of abuse and molestation runs another pattern —



☆ **Aube**

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Aube

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indifference on the part of the Diocese of Manchester to a growing list of pedophilia incidents and victims.

A 9,000-page package released on Monday contained well over 1,000 pages of information on Aube. The materials describe Aube's sexual behavior, correspondence to and from diocesan officials worrying about his fitness as a priest, and even allegations of a cover-up involving the Nashua Police Department.

The release of the papers is

part of a settlement agreement reached in December 2002 between the diocese and then-Attorney General Philip McLaughlin.

A Berlin native, Aube, now 61 years old, joined the Queen of Peace Seminary in 1968, and even then concerns about his mental state are obvious. There is no mention of sexual problems, but a letter that year from the Rev. Thomas A. Hansberry, the vicar general there, to a Dr. J. Edward Connors of Brookline, Mass. asks the psy-

chologist to evaluate Aube.

"He denies help and becomes disturbed when it is given to him," the letter indicated, and further stated Aube "would probably crack under pressure."

Sometime after Aube's evaluation, Hansberry wrote to the Very Rev. Eugene Robitaille at the seminary, to ask "whether you think he should return."

Toward the end of the letter, Hansberry wrote: "With good direction, he may be able to find himself."

Other diocesan records indicate Aube was a loner, and worked excessively. Whatever Aube's problems at the time, however, he managed to complete his studies and become ordained on May 23, 1970. Throughout his career, he worked at four churches, including Holy Rosary in Rochester from 1976-81.

In interviews with investigators, Aube admits to molesting at least five boys throughout his career, including one in Rochester. Interviews with victims indicate there may have been more.

Testimony from victims and their families indicate Aube specifically targeted boys with potential emotional problems,

such as coming from broken homes, poor families, or substance abuse. Aube often got the boys to visit under the auspices of "counseling."

In addition, testimony from parishioners indicate Aube came off as a mystic, claiming to be able to read minds and see the future.

One victim, whom the records do not identify, told investigators he was in his mid-teens when he was kissed, hugged, and ultimately fondled on many occasions by Aube.

"I remember keeping my eyes closed. Um, I don't know, it was a way to pretend it wasn't happening," he said.

Another Rochester victim described being held down by Aube, despite the victim saying "no."

Another boy was a parishioner of Guardian Angel church in Berlin, where Aube served from 1973-75. He said he remembered in the summer one year, possibly 1973, Aube took him and three other boys on a road trip in a motor home to Indiana.

The victim said there was no penetration, but lots of touching and fondling.

"It was pretty much a rape fest. It was one after the other, I mean, same session," he said.

According to Aube and the diocese, the abuse ended in 1981, when an irate mother, suspecting her son had been molested, drove the church to transfer Aube to a hospital ministry at Concord Hospital.

At the same time, letters between diocesan officials and victims who approached the diocese in the late 1980s and early 1990s indicate Aube began to see a psychologist to specifically address his problem of pedophilia.

According to Aube, he paid for the treatment himself, and claimed then-Bishop Odore Gendron did nothing to restrict his duties when he was transferred to the hospital. Aube said he even ministered to children there.

Aube emphatically denied any abuse after his transfer, but a Rochester victim told investigators he remembered visiting Aube at Elliot Hospital in Manchester, where Aube had been transferred in 1983. Aube said he was sent there to replace a chaplain who had died.

The victim said Aube took him for a tour of the hospital, and ultimately kissed and fondled him in the hospital chapel.

Aube said he did not think the church did enough to keep him away from children. He first tried to tell the church he had a problem in a discussion with his pastor at St. Mary's Church in Claremont, Aube's first assignment, where he served from 1970-73.

According to Aube, he told his supervisor he had been involved with fondling and mutual masturbation with "maybe three" boys, all in their late teens, in a number of locations, including the church rectory. Aube said his pastor did not say whether he would report it, and to Aube's knowledge the diocese took no action, and received no complaints of abuse.

with the boy.

Gagnon recalled Aube explained the behavior by saying he "was making him challenge his faith," referring to the victim.

Accounts between the officers, Aube, and the victim do not agree on whether police drove the boy home or if they allowed Aube to do it. Everyone said Aube was not arrested except LeBlanc, who said the priest was picked up, and LeBlanc believed he filed paperwork himself, but "then the entire incident got 'squashed' and went away later."

Exactly how that happened is not clear. Aube said he met with Gendron within days of the incident to tell him what happened.

Within a few weeks, in a follow-up meeting on another matter, Aube claimed "He (Gendron) said, 'Oh, by the way, I contacted the police chief in Nashua and I asked him to do me a favor and make sure there was no record of this in the files, and he assured me that, you know, that would be taken care of.'"

Former Nashua Police Chief Craig Sandler denied to investigators he received any such call. Interviews with multiple officers could offer no other corroboration of who within the department was involved with the cover-up.

Documents in the period between 1975 and 1981 indicate awareness on the part of the diocese of possible mental problems, but there is no mention of sexual misconduct, and certainly no indication of a concern of Aube being around children.

A 1976 letter, presumably after the police encounter, from the Rev. Raymond S. Desjardins, the pastor in Nashua at the time, tells the bishop "We had a long conversation, Paul and myself. I was firm; but I tried to show compassion."

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Allegations of cover-ups get stronger in 1975, when Aube was actually caught by Nashua Police Officers Lionel "Lee" LeBlanc and Dick Gagnon. At the time, Aube was working at St. Aloysius parish in Nashua.

Both officers, now retired, told investigators they discovered Aube in the passenger seat of his Saab one night on Ridge Road in Nashua, with a boy in the driver's seat. Both officers felt the boy was younger than 15, but the victim and Aube told investigators he was 17 years old.

According to LeBlanc and Gagnon's accounts, they were both narcotics officers working in plain clothes that night in an unmarked cruiser. They approached Aube's car to find him in it engaged in oral sex

care of."

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There is a reference to a doctor's appointment, and then the line, "The healing process is on the way, let's hope."

Aube did get psychologically evaluated, but was not taken away from children, even when he asked to be removed to do academic work. Aube said Gendron wanted him to stay in parish ministry, saying the church needed Aube's "talents."

In a 1981 memorandum of an interview Gendron had with Aube, the bishop noted, "He did say at one time that he was tired working with the youth, but still is, I think, quite effective with them."

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