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A Priest's 2 Faces: Protector, Predator

By FOX BUTTERFIELD
with JENNY HONTZ

BOSTON, May 18 — The way Christine Hickey remembers it, the Rev. Paul R. Shanley was her protector, someone who made her feel safe. He was a hero to her parents, who even named one of her sisters, Pauline, after him.

Ms. Hickey felt especially indebted to Father Shanley for what he did after she was sexually abused at her church in Stoneham, Mass., by another Roman Catholic priest, James Porter, in 1967, when she was about 9. Father Shanley reported Father Porter to the Boston Archdiocese and arranged to have him sent for treatment to a church-run center in New Mexico. Mr. Porter is now serving an 18-year prison sentence for child sexual abuse in Massachusetts as one of the most serious pedophile priests ever discovered.

But Ms. Hickey had no idea then that Father Shanley had been accused of sexual abuse himself. The father of an 11-year-old boy had reported him to the police six years earlier, barely a year after his ordination. Nor could Ms. Hickey have known that more than 30 people would eventually come forward with a trail of accusations against Father Shanley that would span the next three decades.

Father Shanley, 71, who was arrested this month on charges of raping a 6-year-old boy in 1983, has become a central figure in the sexual abuse crisis that has spread beyond the Boston Archdiocese to convulse the entire American church.

Like another disgraced priest, John J. Geoghan, Father Shanley was protected by top officials of the Boston Archdiocese. Church documents show that they vouched for his character and allowed him to continue working as a priest despite repeated accusations of abuse.

Like Mr. Geoghan, Father Shanley has been vilified as a marauding sociopath.

But as Ms. Hickey's account suggests, his story is not that simple. Interviews with Father Shanley's accusers, his relatives and people who worked with him, as well as an examination of thousands of pages of court papers and his previously undisclosed private writings, portray a man split in two: part protector, part predator, with the church central to both roles, providing both his mission and his cover.

It is a contradiction that some who know him find impossible to reconcile.

"I really think both sides of him are real," said Ms. Hickey, now 44 and a school administrator in Cambridge. "On the one hand, he did wonderful things," she said, particularly as a "street priest"



The Boston Globe

1974 The Rev. Paul R. Shanley, whose youth ministry in Boston won praise, addressed a State House hearing.



Associated Press

1985 Father Shanley spoke with Archbishop Bernard F. Law of Boston at Father Shanley's Silver Jubilee celebration.



Associated Press

2002 Father Shanley at a San Diego hearing this month after being charged in Massachusetts with raping a boy in 1983.

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in Boston in the late 1960's and 1970's, when he ran a widely admired ministry for runaway youths and later for gays, and gained national attention, including a mention in "Common Ground," the Pulitzer Prize-winning book about Boston by J. Anthony Lu-
kis.

"I felt loved by him," she said. "He helped me tremendously."

On the other hand, said Ms. Hickey, who went through a period of nightmares and alcoholism after her own molestation, "he abused and took advantage" of some of the very people entrusted to his care.

Perhaps, she reasoned, "There is no real truth."

No one who knew Paul Shanley seemed to know who he really was. Maybe he wanted it that way.

For from early on, he was living with a dark secret. He has said he was molested by a priest at age 12, forced to have oral sex, according to notes of a psychiatrist's interview with him at the Institute of Living in Hartford, Conn., in 1994.

The Boston archdiocese released the notes as part of more than 1,600 pages of documents it was required to produce as a result of a lawsuit filed by Gregory Ford, who says Father Shanley molested him at St. John the Evangelist Church in Newton from 1983, when Mr. Ford was 6, until 1989.

Father Shanley never told his family about his own abuse — not his brothers, his sisters-in-law or his favorite niece. "That was really a shock to me," said Estelle Shanley, the widow of Father Shanley's brother, Donald Shanley. "He never showed any signs of any stress people might exhibit. He was very solid and well-adjusted."

Father Shanley, who is in jail in Cambridge, could not be reached for comment. His lawyer, Frank Mondano, did not return phone calls.

Experts have long recognized that children who are physically or sexually abused are at risk of becoming abusers themselves. So Kay Jackson, a psychologist who is director of the Metropolitan Center, a private center for sex offenders in New York, said she had been waiting to see when a priest charged with child sexual abuse would come forward to say he had been abused as a boy.

"Our society tends to divide up perpetrators and victims into neat camps," Dr. Jackson said. "What if they're the same?"

Early Years

Social Work Plans Lead to the Seminary

Paul Shanley was born in 1931 in Dorchester, a heavily Irish, working-class section of Boston where residents knew one another by the parish churches they attended.

The parish pastor was a crucial figure in their lives. Since Irish immigrants began to settle in Boston in large numbers in the 1840's, suffering discrimination from the established Yankees, local priests had guided them not only spiritually, but also in countless other ways, filling out citizenship papers, paying rent and helping to organize unions.

So the Irish of Dorchester repaid their priests with what little they had — admiration, unquestioning deference and a willingness to forgive foibles, like whiskey and sexual activity, said Eugene Kennedy, a former priest and emeritus professor of psychology at Loyola University in Chicago.

Paul Shanley grew up in this world. His father owned a bowling alley and pool room. His mother was a genteel, pious woman who was a legal secretary and looked on Paul as her favorite child. "The family was very Catholic," Estelle Shanley said, and "at the time it was height of achievement for a mother to have a son go into the priesthood."

In a brief autobiography he wrote after graduating from high school in 1950, young Paul described himself as a mediocre student who liked to play spin the bottle and post office with the girls. A guidance counselor urged him to learn printing at a vocational school, but at the suggestion of a worker at a Y.M.C.A., where was a counselor, Paul took a battery of aptitude tests.

They "proved conclusively what I had suspected," Father Shanley wrote, that his talents lay in another direction. "This field was social work or, more specifically, boys' work."

He switched to Huntington Prep, a college-back high school, and spent summers as a

camp counselor. After getting his diploma, Paul wrote: "I have thus far penetrated seven fields of boy's work. They are: summer camping, scouting, Y.M.C.A., day camping, club groups, settlement home and boys' home."

"It can be seen from this listing the predominance of social work over other fields," Paul wrote. "This might show a natural preference. My vocational plans are, strange to say, boy's work."

Paul enrolled at Boston University, but after two years transferred to St. John's Seminary in Boston. He has left no record explaining his decision, but Estelle Shanley, who first met him then, said: "Paul had a piety. He had a very understanding manner about him. He was very much a do-gooder. He wanted to do good, and I think Paul saw the priesthood as a way to do good work."

In retrospect, it is tempting to conclude that something happened to Paul Shanley at St. John's. His class of 1960, with 77 men, included five priests who have since been accused of sexually abusing children.

Father Shanley, in a letter to a Boston Archdiocese official in 1995, said he had been abused at the seminary by a priest and a faculty member. But several priests who were in Father Shanley's class said they never heard of any sexual activity at St. John's.

On the contrary, said the Rev. Richard McBrien, a 1962 graduate and now a professor of theology at Notre Dame, "the seminaries in those days were very strict, very conservative, like minimum security prisons." Each student had his own room, he said, "and one of the most serious rules you could break was to be found in another student's room."

There was no formal preparation for the chaste life of a priest. "There were no classes about it, and we took no vow of celibacy," Professor McBrien said. "It was just assumed we would be celibate."

The Priesthood

From the Beginning, Accusations of Abuse

Two weeks after he was ordained in 1960, Paul Shanley was named an assistant pastor at St. Patrick's Church in Stoneham, a working-class suburb north of Boston.

A year later, Bernie Vacon, the Stoneham police chief, got his first molestation complaint about Father Shanley. The father of an 11-year-old boy called Chief Vacon to report that his son had been severely sexually abused. Chief Vacon said he took the complaint seriously because the father was a doctor, a senior lay member of the church and a Middlesex County official.

Chief Vacon, in a recent interview, recalled confronting Father Shanley, who told him nothing had happened.

"I said, 'What do you mean, nothing?'"

"Shanley said: 'I was standing in his bed-



Job Hilton for The New York Times



Marjorie Mahoney, left, says the Rev. Paul R. Shanley began sexually abusing her brother Bill O'Toole when he was 12, in 1962. Father Shanley "warned Bill that if he told anyone, he would burn in hell," Ms. Mahoney says. Mr. O'Toole, far right front, with Ms. Mahoney and other siblings in 1985, battled drug addiction and died of AIDS in 1998.

room. He had pornography. I was just trying to straighten him out."

"I was pretty upset," Chief Vacon said. "Shanley got away with it because the father didn't want to go public with a prosecution against a priest. He was ashamed this had happened and he didn't want a fight with the church. That's how it was in those days."

The boy's mother did write to the pastor, Msgr. John Sexton, and to Cardinal Richard Cushing in Boston, Chief Vacon said, but there was no investigation by the church, as far as he knows.

Chief Vacon said he soon began getting other calls about Father Shanley, whom he called "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Without cooperation, the most Chief Vacon could do was to never go back to St. Patrick's, the church in which he was raised and where his aunt was a nun teaching in the church school.

In 1962, Marjorie Mahoney of Stoneham says, Father Shanley found another victim: her brother Bill O'Toole, then 12. On weekends, for a year and a half, Father Shanley took Bill on retreats to a cabin he had in the Blue Hill Reservation area of Milton, said Ms. Mahoney, whose father and grandfather were police officers in Stoneham.

"There would be other boys, but they would always be one bed short, so Bill would have to sleep with Shanley," Ms. Mahoney recalled.

"He told Bill he was doing the Lord's work by finding out who the homosexuals were," she said. "Shanley also warned Bill that if he told anyone, he would burn in hell."

In fact, Ms. Mahoney said, Bill did tell one of his brothers, Michael O'Toole, now a Stoneham policeman. Bill began having trouble in school and eventually became a drug addict, then determined he was gay and moved to San Francisco.

In 1998, Bill O'Toole died of AIDS. As he lay dying in a hospice, his mother said she was going to call a priest to say the last rites, Ms. Mahoney said. "But Bill said you can't do that." When their mother asked why, he blurted out the whole story, including Father Shanley's warning that he would burn in hell if he ever told. "You could see the terror in his eyes," Ms. Mahoney said.

Professor Kennedy, who has studied priests with troubled sex lives, said the actions Ms. Mahoney ascribed to Father Shanley were classic. "In his mind, he was an angel for saving these boys; that was his rationalization," Professor Kennedy said. "He got tremendous gratification thinking he was their savior, which kept him from recognizing that he is the predator."

Street Ministry

Reaching Addicts, Gays and Runaways

In 1969, Father Shanley began what the church called his "Youth Apostolate." Working without a church, from a small home in Roxbury, a poor, black section of the city, he

ministered to the thousands of young people who were running away from home, experimenting with drugs and sex and often ending up homeless and sick.

He let his hair grow long, and traded in his black garb and Roman collar for blue jeans.

"All that societal churning was going on, and Paul Shanley was right in the middle of it," Estelle Shanley said.

His work was so inspiring that in 1970 three young Catholic nuns went to visit one of Father Shanley's programs, a residential drug treatment center, and ended up establishing their own full-time agency for young people on the street.

Thirty years later, their agency, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, is the main one of its kind in Boston, and Sister Barbara Whelan is still the director. "If I had not met Paul Shanley, I would not have spent the last 32 years of my life helping abused kids," she said.

"He had a real sense of why kids were hurting and was very committed to helping kids who had been abused," Sister Whelan said. "That was his thing. And most of the kids we saw had been abused."

Gradually after Bridge was founded, Father Shanley turned to work with young gay people, Sister Whelan said, and given the church's views on homosexual acts as sinful, he adopted a posture that seemed almost deliberately provocative.

In a 1970's interview with The Catholic Reporter, a liberal Catholic weekly, Father Shanley said homosexuality and bisexuality were "normal, natural" and not "pathological," as some in the church maintained. "I don't think sexual activity among members of the same sex is so much the problem. It's what society says and does about it."

The article, along with about two dozen more, were in Father Shanley's personnel file, included in the documents the archdiocese released.

Separately, in a speech at a church in Rochester, N.Y., in 1977, Father Shanley said that when an adult and a child have sex, "the adult is not the seducer — the kid is the seducer." Moreover, if the adult is punished for the act, it will only traumatize the child, Father Shanley said, according to notes taken by a woman who was there who and then wrote to the Boston archdiocese to complain.

By 1979, the leader of the Boston archdiocese, Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, had heard enough and ended Father Shanley's ministry to gays. But without any investigation, Cardinal Medeiros made him pastor at St. John's in Newton. It was there he is accused of the abuse of the two 6-year-old boys that has resulted in the current civil lawsuit and criminal charges against him.

Moving West

Mounting Lawsuits And Failing Health

In 1990 Cardinal Bernard F. Law ended

Father Shanley's post in Newton, for reasons in dispute, and allowed him to go on sick leave to southern California, without telling the local bishop in San Bernardino County about his background.

Father Shanley moved to Palm Springs where he filled in as a priest some Sundays and also owned a motel for gays with a fellow Boston priest, John White. Father White had been sent to California after suffering from depression, according to church documents.

Father Shanley apparently was in poor health then. His doctor, James Shaner, of Rancho Mirage, Calif., said in a 1991 letter that he had gastroenteritis, a hernia, chronic anxiety neurosis, severe allergies, asthma, Bell's palsy, loss of hearing, insomnia and an enlarged prostate.

After being seen at the Institute of Living in 1994, he was found to have a "somatoform disorder," according to a confidential report to a special review board created by Cardinal Law to deal with priests accused of sexual abuse. The disorder involves multiple physical ailments not fully explained by an actual illness.

It could be, several psychiatrists said, that Father Shanley's anxiety about his past actions, or his fear of being found out, was finally catching up with him.

He began telling church officials that someone was stalking him, and he tried to keep his identity as a priest secret. When one neighbor in San Diego in whom he had confided told some other people, Father Shanley was angry.

"You continue to tell people that I am a priest despite my wishes. So back off," he wrote to her by e-mail.

A psychiatrist who evaluated him at the Institute of Living in 1994 said Father Shanley had admitted the four accusations of sexual abuse made against him up to that point and acknowledged that he was "attracted to adolescents." On this basis, the church secretly settled several lawsuits against him.

There are now accusations by more than 30 men, some from Stoneham, some from his days as a street priest, some from Newton, and at least two new cases from Father Shanley's time in southern California in the 1990's, said Roderick MacLeish Jr., a lawyer with Greenberg, Traurig in Boston who is suing Cardinal Law over his handling of Father Shanley.

The number of lawsuits may grow, Mr. MacLeish said, because he is getting new calls every week.

Yet he never told his sister-in-law or his favorite niece, Teresa Shanley, about the charges against him, even when he returned to Boston from time to time to help care for his brother, Teresa's father, Donald, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. "I love him and stand by him," Ms. Shanley said after visiting him in jail. "He's like a father to me."

"I believe in his innocence, as he has told me he is innocent," she said.