

# Catholic bishop quits, admits molesting teen

## Florida clergyman confesses to acts over 25 years ago

Associated Press

**PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla.** — A Roman Catholic bishop admitted molesting a teen-ager at a Missouri seminary more than 25 years ago and resigned yesterday, becoming the highest-ranking clergyman brought down in a wave of allegations touched off by the sex scandal in Boston.

"I am truly, deeply sorry for the pain, hurt, anger and confusion I have caused," said the Rev. Anthony O'Connell, bishop of the Diocese of Palm Beach. "I've been loved since I entered this diocese, far more than anyone should be loved."

O'Connell, 63, admitted to the allegations leveled by Christopher Dixon, his former student at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Hannibal, Mo. O'Connell was the rector there.

Dixon, now 40, said the two touched inappropriately in bed after he sought out O'Connell for counseling. Dixon said the abuse began when he was in the ninth grade and continued through the 12th grade.

"I was as wrong as I can be in taking that approach with him and I am sorry," he said. "There was nothing in the relationship that was anything other than touches."

Asked whether he had been involved with any other youngsters, O'Connell said there could be "one other person of a somewhat similar

situation, in a somewhat similar time frame." He would not elaborate.

The Jefferson City, Mo., Diocese paid Dixon \$125,000 in a 1996 settlement, and he promised not to pursue further claims against the diocese, O'Connell and two other priests. The diocese did not admit any wrongdoing.

The other priests are the Rev. Manus Daly, who allegedly abused Dixon at the seminary, and the Rev. John Fischer, who allegedly began abusing Dixon at a Catholic school when he was 11. Daly was removed from a Marceline, Mo., church this week and Fischer was removed from the priesthood in 1993 after allegations involving other children.

The nation's latest and biggest sex-abuse scandal involving priests began in the Archdiocese of Boston, where Cardinal Bernard Law admitted that a former priest molested children for years but was shuttled from parish to parish anyway. More than 130 people have come forward to say the defrocked priest, John Geoghan, abused them.

Since January, when the Boston case gained national attention, dozens of priests out of more than 47,000 nationwide have been suspended or forced to resign, and priests' names have been turned over to prosecutors.

O'Connell, who has been a priest for 38 years, was bishop of Knoxville, Tenn., before going to Palm Beach in 1999. He succeeded J. Keith Symons, the first U.S. bishop to resign because of sexual involvement with boys.

O'Connell's admission came only