

Ex-priest accused of abuse served jail sentence

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Navy confirmed yesterday that an ex-Lincoln priest accused of sexually abusing four Nebraska boys in 1978 was later convicted of lewd conduct involving boys as a military chaplain.

Robert Hrdlicka, who became a Navy chaplain in 1986, was court-martialed for seven counts of acts unbecoming an officer, Navy spokesman Lt. Jon Spiers said. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 1993 and released in 1999.

The case — among many to rock the Roman Catholic church across the country recently — has been revived in the Lincoln Diocese, which said this week that the four brothers, now adults, are demanding \$2 million to keep quiet about their alleged abuse at the hands of Hrdlicka.

"I'm not going to say it's blackmail," said attorney Rocky Weber, who represents the diocese. "They demanded this payment and threatened to go public if the bishop didn't accommodate them. There is no intention of paying."

Hrdlicka's whereabouts are unknown; a telephone listed under the same name in nearby Crete, Neb., rang unanswered yesterday.

Hrdlicka was relieved of Navy duty after an investigation began into reports of molestation while he was stationed at the Naval Air Station Sigonella in Italy in 1988. Investigators said there were two incidents in Italy and five more in Beaufort, S.C., involving boys ages 7 to 11.

Lincoln Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz said that when he took over as bishop in 1992, there was no record of any accusations against Hrdlicka.

He said he suspended Hrdlicka, who was still affiliated with the diocese, in 1993 after learning of his troubles in the Navy. Bruskewitz said he then began an inquiry and eventually learned of the allegations made by the four brothers.

He said the brothers and their representatives did not ask for compensation at that time and were concerned only that Hrdlicka "was no longer functioning as a priest."

Elsewhere in Nebraska, in Omaha, Archbishop Elden Curtiss is under fire for transferring a priest accused of viewing child pornography from a school in Norfolk, Neb., and allowing him to continue teaching in the Omaha area.

As Easter weekend approached, sex-abuse scandals involving the Roman Catholic Church continued to come to light in cities throughout the country.

In Boston, police arrested a man who tried to confront the priest he had accused of sexually abusing him 23 years ago. Garry Garland, 38, who was arrested Thursday at the home of Monsignor Frederick Ryan, is charged with driving offenses and disorderly conduct and was expected to remain under psychiatric care.

St. Louis school officials defended the district for hiring a defrocked priest as an elementary school counselor, saying the church secretly settled sex-abuse lawsuits against him. The comments came a day after the former priest, James Beine, was accused of exposing himself to boys at the grade school.

And in Detroit, a county prosecutor subpoenaed a bishop for information in an investigation into a sexual misconduct charge leveled against a priest by a woman.