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Papers in Pedophile Case Show Church Effort to Avert Scandal

By PAM BELLUCK

BOSTON, Jan. 24 — The Roman Catholic archdiocese here seemed more preoccupied with avoiding a scandal involving a pedophile priest than making sure the priest had no further contact with children, documents released today suggest.

The documents — depositions, letters and memorandums from 84 civil lawsuits against the priest and the archdiocese — reveal in detail that the church knew of the priest's pedophilia, but moved him from one parish to another for 30 years.

The revelations prompted Boston's cardinal, Bernard F. Law, to apologize for the second time this month for the archdiocese's handling of the priest, John J. Geoghan, 66, who was convicted last week of molesting a boy in a youth club pool and faces two more criminal trials on similar charges.

More than 130 people in half a dozen parishes here said Mr. Geoghan, who was defrocked in 1998, molested them as children in incidents that occurred from 1962 to 1995. The church has settled about 50 lawsuits for a total of more than \$10 million.

"I made a mistake in assigning John Geoghan," Cardinal Law said. "I regret that assignment, and I have attempted to learn from that mistake."

In a departure from longstanding church policy, the cardinal also announced that he would require clergymen and officials of the archdiocese to report to the authorities past accusations of sexual abuse by priests.

"We will be going to public authorities with the names of all priests that we are aware of that have abused minors," Cardinal Law said.

He also said he was convening a panel of medical experts to study ways to prevent child abuse and deal with victims.

The 10,000 pages of new documents include depositions by bishops who were aware of Mr. Geoghan's problem, notes from psychiatrists who evaluated him, letters from parishioners complaining of church inaction and letters from the two cardinals during Mr. Geoghan's tenure, the late Cardinal Humberto Medeiros and Cardinal Law.

The Boston archdiocese has long tried to keep the documents sealed, and they became public only after The Boston Globe filed a request to

see them and a judge ordered the records opened last year. The Globe published excerpts and an analysis of the records today.

In one deposition, Bishop Thomas V. Daily, now leader of the Brooklyn diocese, was asked if it were archdiocesan policy "to avoid scandal where possible."

The bishop replied, "Yes."

"And were these events types of events that would cause scandal for the church?" Bishop Daily was asked.

"Yes," he replied.

In a 1982 letter, Margaret Gallant, a relative of seven boys molested by Mr. Geoghan, wrote to Cardinal Medeiros complaining that Bishop Daily had "suggested that we keep silent." Her relatives, Mrs. Gallant wrote, "never as much as received an apology from the church, much less any offer for counseling for the boys."

In reply, Cardinal Medeiros wrote, "While I am and must be very sensitive to a very delicate situation and one that has caused great scandal, I must at the same time invoke the mercy of God and share in that mercy in the knowledge that God forgives sins and that sinners indeed can be forgiven."

In the documents, church officials, including Cardinal Law, often treated Mr. Geoghan as a sinner who had repented and recovered.

"It is most heartening to know that things have gone well for you and

Revelations prompt a new apology from Boston's cardinal.

that you are ready to resume your efforts with a renewed zeal," Cardinal Law wrote to Mr. Geoghan in 1989, when the cardinal allowed the priest to return to St. Julia Parish in suburban Weston after treatment.

The documents released today deepened the anger that Boston Catholics already felt over the church's handling of the case.

"Even the ones who raised the red flag, they raised it as scandal, they said they didn't want scandal to come to the church," said Thomas H. Groome, a professor of religious education at Boston College. "That the



Pool photo by Kevin Wisniewski

John J. Geoghan, a former Roman Catholic priest, at his trial.

crime had caused extraordinary damage to the parishioners and their children was not in their consciousness."

Some parishioners and a few priests have called on Cardinal Law to resign. But today the cardinal, who is considered close to the pope and is one of the country's most influential Roman Catholic leaders, dismissed that possibility.

"The solution to this problem as I see it does not include my resignation as archbishop," Cardinal Law said. "You don't walk away when the problem is difficult."

Two weeks ago, in his first apology, the cardinal announced a policy of zero tolerance of future sexual abuse of children by priests and required clergymen to report evidence of such abuse to the state authorities. This followed a Vatican order requiring all archdioceses to report accusations of pedophilia to the Vatican.

But this week, the Senate in this heavily Roman Catholic state voted to go beyond Cardinal Law's actions, passing an amendment that would require reporting of evidence of past sexual abuse.

"In a state like Massachusetts, in a city like Boston, I think that's a considerable turnaround," said Thomas H. O'Connor, the university historian at Boston College. "The general per-

ception was that the Legislature would do pretty much what the cardinal said, but they can't afford to take that position any longer."

In response to the Legislature, the cardinal revised archdiocese policy to require reporting of past abuse as well.

In his first apology, Cardinal Law said he relied on psychiatric evaluations that suggested Mr. Geoghan could be safely reassigned to parishes. The newly disclosed documents contain a number of positive evaluations of Mr. Geoghan. But they also include negative ones, including notes that Bishop Robert J. Banks took from a conversation he had with one of Mr. Geoghan's psychiatrists in 1989, saying "you can't afford to have him in a parish," and "you better clip his wings before there is an explosion."

Later that year, Mr. Geoghan was removed for treatment and then allowed to return to St. Julia Parish. Soon after Mr. Geoghan's reinstatement, the documents show, Bishop Banks wrote to doctors at the treatment center, who had written that Mr. Geoghan had "atypical pedophilia, in remission" and "mixed personality disorder with obsessive-compulsive, histrionic and narcissistic features."

In his note, Bishop Banks said that he was disappointed by the evaluation and that he had been given oral assurances by the center that "it would be all right to reassign Father Geoghan to pastoral ministry." The bishop asked for a letter confirming that, and he received a note from the doctor saying it was "quite safe" to reinstate Mr. Geoghan in the parish and "the probability that he would sexually act out again is quite low."

The documents make little mention of Mr. Geoghan's victims and give little indication that the church offered the victims counseling or comfort.

Today, several people who say they were molested by Mr. Geoghan as boys said the documents destroyed their trust and respect for the church.

"I believe in the Catholic religion, but I can't go to church," said Anthony Muzzi Jr., 47, who said he was molested over two years, sometimes while Mr. Geoghan was "blessing us in the bedroom."

"I've lost my faith in the church," Mr. Muzzi said. "I have to say my prayers in my vehicle going to and from work."