

Papers Show Officials Knew Of Priest's Troubles in 1991

By PAM BELLUCK

BOSTON, May 14 — Officials in the Boston Archdiocese were told in 1991 that the Rev. Paul R. Shanley had serious psychiatric problems, two years before they informed church officials in California, where Father Shanley was serving as a pastor, according to psychiatric and medical records released today.

The documents also show that by 1994 church officials knew Father Shanley was such a problem that they were trying to figure out how to prevent him from abusing others.

"Father Shanley is so personally damaged that his pathology is beyond repair," wrote the Rev. John B. McCormack, the archdiocesan official then in charge of problem priests, in a 1994 memorandum. "How do we protect others from him. Could he be laicized? What is important is that he does not practice as a priest."

Nonetheless, in 1995, archdiocesan officials approved of Father Shanley's move to Manhattan to run a Roman Catholic guest house, and for months, gave New York church officials little information about his history, documents released last month indicated. As late as 1997, Cardinal Bernard F. Law wrote to New York's cardinal, John O'Connor, supporting Father Shanley for a permanent position at Leo House, the New York guest house. The letter was not sent, apparently because Father Shanley was rejected for the job.

Father Shanley, 71, has become a central figure in the clergy sexual abuse scandal in Boston. Some 26 people have claimed that he sexually abused them when they were young, and Father Shanley was recently charged with child rape in the case of a man who said he was molested by the priest for six years at a parish in Newton, Mass.

Archdiocesan officials, who opposed releasing the records, had no comment on the documents today.

The documents, ordered released by a judge in a lawsuit filed by another young man who claims he was molested by Father Shanley, include psychiatric assessments of the priest from 1991 to 1994, when Father Shanley was at a parish in San Bernardino, Calif., but was still under

the auspices of the Boston Archdiocese. Three pages of documents were not released. Why is not clear.

One document made public, a 1991 letter from a Massachusetts psychiatrist, said Father Shanley "is primarily crippled by his psychiatric illness."

"It is virtually certain that his psychiatric diagnosis is more severe than what used to be called anxiety disorder," it said.

The letter, from Dr. Edwin H. Cassem, who wrote that he was basing his opinion mostly on an evaluation by a California general practitioner, said of Father Shanley, "Should he in fact be diagnosed via formal psychiatric consultation?"

There is no evidence in the documents that the archdiocese acted to get Father Shanley psychiatric evaluation or treatment at the time.

Dr. Cassem's letter was written to Father McCormack, who is now bishop of New Hampshire. Father McCormack appeared to be seeking advice about whether to bring Father Shanley back to Boston to work as a priest. Father Shanley had submitted the general practitioner's evaluation to bolster his request to

How the Boston Archdiocese tried to handle an abuser.

stay in California, and Dr. Cassem questioned whether Father Shanley might be manipulating the archdiocese so he could stay in California.

Archdiocesan officials allowed Father Shanley to stay in California and did not tell church officials there about his problems until 1993, after they received complaints that the priest had molested boys while he was in Massachusetts.

As a result, archdiocesan officials ordered Father Shanley examined at the Institute of Living in Hartford. Notes apparently taken by a church official of a conversation with Father Shanley's lawyer about the results



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The Rev. Paul Shanley last week at a hearing in Cambridge, Mass.

said, "Bottom line attracted to late adolescents." The notes, which are handwritten and in parts difficult to read, also said "not a significant risk," but added that Father Shanley had "suicidal projections."

Records from a few months later, including the August 1994 memorandum from Father McCormack, are more strongly worded. That memorandum concluded that "Father Shanley cannot do any kind of ministry," and said that the bishop in charge of Palm Springs, where Father Shanley was then living, must be informed.

In October 1994, Father Shanley's case was discussed by the archdiocesan review board. Notes from that discussion said that he "rationalizes the events of the past." The notes said that Father Shanley's condition included a "personality disorder with narcissistic histrionic and dependent features." They said that "although there are many conflicts in the area of sexuality, there does not appear to be evidence of a diagnosable sexual disorder."

As a result of these discussions, archdiocesan officials prevented Father Shanley from working as a priest and told him that he could not work near children, earlier documents show. But those documents show that it was not until months after he arrived in New York that Boston church officials provided New York officials with more details about his history.