

# Priest's apparent suicide followed abuse allegation

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — A Roman Catholic priest shot himself to death in his car days after being accused of molesting a girl more than two decades ago, authorities said yesterday.

The Rev. Don A. Rooney, 48, was found slumped over the wheel of his car Thursday, a gunshot wound to his head, in a pharmacy parking lot in the Cleveland suburb of Hinckley, Ohio. Cuyahoga County coroner Dr. Elizabeth Balraj ruled it suicide.

The priest left a note. "It was just to notify a family member. That's all," Balraj said.

"We're just all in shock," said Victoria Pisano, a parishioner at Rooney's church, St. Anthony of Padua in Parma, Ohio. "I can't believe he would take his life being a man of faith."

The apparent suicide marks the latest in an escalating crisis for the U.S. Catholic Church, which has grappled with allegations of long-ignored sexual abuse of children by priests in many of its dioceses.

Robert Tayek, a spokesman for the Cleveland Diocese, said a woman had called on Monday to allege that Rooney, as a newly ordained priest, sexually abused her in 1980 when she



The Rev. Don A. Rooney, 48, was found slumped over the wheel of his car with a gunshot to his head Thursday, three days after he was accused of molesting a girl in 1980.

was a girl. The alleged abuse was said to have occurred at Rooney's first priestly assignment, at a church in Wadsworth, Ohio.

The allegation was turned over to the Wadsworth police, Tayek said.

Tayek said church officials had tried unsuccessfully to reach Rooney on Monday at the church rectory when the allegations were first made.

Church officials spoke to Rooney on Tuesday, summoning him to a meeting the next day at the diocese offices. He was not told the reason for the meeting.

When Rooney did not show up Wednesday, church officials grew alarmed, calling a family member to help find him, and he was later reported missing.