

Teacher says clergy asked her to quit

Woman reported that priest viewed child porn on computer

By AMY LORENTZEN
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — A teacher at a Catholic school says the archbishop of Omaha asked her to resign because she told police that a priest had used a church computer to look at child pornography.

Archbishop Elden Curtiss acknowledges that he talked with Norfolk Sacred Heart kindergarten teacher Linda Hammond, but did not say if he asked her to resign. She did not resign.

Madison County Attorney Joe Smith said he was considering charges against Curtiss, including a count of tampering with a witness. "I'm asking the police to do a little more investigating on it, then I'll make a decision," Smith said Friday.

Hammond has been identified in court as a witness in the case against the Rev. Robert Allgaier, a former Norfolk priest charged in February with attempted possession of child pornography.

She said Curtiss asked her to resign May 8 and that at least two others were witnesses. The conversation was made public Thursday in a report by the Norfolk Daily News.

In a statement issued Friday, Curtiss said he did not know Hammond was a witness in the case before their brief meeting. To file witness-tampering charges, authorities would have to prove that he attempted to dissuade the teacher from testifying in the Allgaier case.

"Since I did not seek out Mrs. Hammond and did not invite contact with her, the idea that I attempted to influence her role in the forthcoming trial ... is incorrect," Curtiss said.

Hammond said she introduced herself to Curtiss at a Mass in Norfolk as "the one who went to the police about Father Allgaier."

Hammond said the archbishop immediately told her that she ruined Allgaier's life.

"He started off by saying 'You shouldn't have done this. We had it handled,'" Hammond said.

The prosecutor has criticized the archbishop for not coming forward with the evidence against Allgaier. He said Curtiss knew for eight months that Allgaier had looked at pornography before Hammond came forward.

"If it hadn't been for Linda Hammond, the police and people ... probably would never have known" about Allgaier, Smith said. "So treating a person like Mrs. Hammond rudely is significant."

According to court records, Allgaier admitted to Curtiss in February 2001 that he had been looking at child pornography up to four

times a week.

The archbishop removed Allgaier from his teaching duties at Norfolk Catholic High School and ordered him to avoid contact with children outside worship services. The church also had Allgaier evaluated by a psychologist and the priest entered counseling.

However, Curtiss transferred Allgaier in June to St. Gerald's Catholic Church in Ralston, where Allgaier's duties included teaching religion at a middle school in Omaha.

In other developments:

■ The Rev. Maurice Blackwell, a Roman Catholic priest in Baltimore, was released from the hospital five days after a gunshot attack by a man who had alleged the cleric sexually abused him as a teen-ager.

■ In Hollywood, Fla., a pastor at a Catholic school delayed reporting abuse allegations against a teacher in the 1980s, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported. The Rev. Patrick J. Murnane eventually admitted the school did not report the allegations until someone threatened to expose them. The teacher was convicted of molesting a dozen children ages 5 to 12.

■ A priest has resigned from his job at a Hartford, Conn., middle school after acknowledging two complaints that he fondled adolescent boys when he was a deacon in the early 1970s. The abuse involving the Rev. Louis Paturzo allegedly occurred before he began his ministry in Hartford in 1981.