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# More Allegations Of Abuse At St. Mary's Probed

Aug 22, 2002 | The Washington Post



Maryland law enforcement agencies are investigating recent complaints by two men who say they were sexually molested decades ago by two Baltimore seminary students while on a camping trip and during overnight stays at the seminary, the Baltimore state's attorney's office said yesterday.

Prosecutors in Baltimore are investigating abuse allegations against former priest John Banko while authorities in Worcester County are looking into similar claims against former priest Mark Haight.

The two are among six former seminarians whose names were released Monday by the Archdiocese of Baltimore in connection with allegations that they sexually abused children while studying for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary. The six -- Bruce E. Ball, Banko, Haight, Michael LaMountain, Francis McGrath and Raymond Melville - went on to be ordained in other states and were later caught up in child-abuse scandals.

Three of the six were later convicted of or settled civil child-abuse charges, a fourth was forced to resign from the priesthood and the other two recently were accused of molestation. None is an active priest, the diocese said.

Archdiocese spokesman Stephen Kearney said the names of the six men were released in hopes that if other victims exist, they will come forward.

"We felt that in order to reach out to victims beyond the ones we're aware of, we also needed to make it public here, Kearney said. "The goal in doing this is making it clear to victims that we believe them. We want to apologize and offer counseling and help."

It is the second time this year that allegations of misconduct have hit the quiet, park-like campus at St. Mary's, the oldest Catholic seminary in the United States. Earlier, a Baltimore man alleged that the Rev. Maurice J. Blackwell raped him in a seminary room while two other seminarians guarded the door.

The Rev. Robert F. Leavitt, rector of the college, said college officials were unaware of any past incidents of abuse within its walls.

"The seminary has no knowledge of any incidents involving its students prior to recent disclosures," Leavitt said in a statement. "A review of these cases disclosed no indications or allegations of sexual abuse in seminary records."

Baltimore prosecutors are examining allegations that Banko, who was a student at St. Mary's from 1964 to 1968, sexually abused a minor for 10 years beginning in 1970, fondling the youth during visits to the seminary, the child's home and in his car.

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Banko, who declined to comment, was later ordained by the Trenton, N.J., diocese. He now faces charges of sexually assaulting an 11-year-old altar boy in Milford, N.J., in 1993 or 1994, according to Steve Emery, a diocese spokesman.



Law enforcement officials in Baltimore have referred a complaint from another accuser to investigators in Worcester County. A 43-year-old man contacted the Baltimore Archdiocese in April and said that Haight, a seminarian who studied at St. Mary's from 1972 to 1975, molested him while on a camping trip to Assateague Island in 1974 and in Haight's room at the seminary. Haight was later ordained by the diocese of Albany, N.Y., which acknowledged this year that it had paid \$1 million to settle a 1997 abuse case involving him. Haight was removed from the ministry in 1996.

The Baltimore prosecutor's office was still trying to determine the status of the complaints against Ball and McGrath, said spokeswoman Margaret T. Burns.

In 1994, two brothers contacted the diocese of LaCrosse, Wis., and said that Ball had fondled them on several occasions beginning in 1975, while he was at St. Mary's. Ball was later defrocked and served jail time in Wisconsin for unrelated child sex offenses.

Earlier this year, another man contacted church officials in Baltimore and told them he had been abused by McGrath, who studied at St. Mary's from 1972 to 1974 and again from 1976 to 1977 before going on to teach at the private Gilman School and later Calvert Hall College High School during the 1970s.

McGrath left the priesthood in 1974 after he acknowledged sexual-abuse allegations involving "three or four victims" in different Trenton parishes, the Trenton diocese spokesman said.

As early as 1990, a Baltimore boy accused Melville of abusing him from 1980 to 1985, while the boy was in high school and Melville was a seminarian working at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Baltimore, church officials and lawyers said. The former priest faces a lawsuit from a Maine man who said Melville assaulted him from 1985 to 1992.

In another case, Baltimore prosecutors investigated and then closed for lack of evidence a case against LaMountain

who was accused of abusing a 14-year-old boy in his room at Most Precious Blood Catholic Church and his room at the seminary in 1973. The popular priest, known as "Father Mike," later pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting five teenage boys in Rhode Island from 1979 to 1992.

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