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Priest Held On Sex Abuse Charges

Grayslake Man Allegedly Molested Boys At Maryland School In 1980s

February 07, 2001 | By Amanda Vogt, Tribune Staff Writer.



A Grayslake priest accused of molesting two boys at a Maryland boarding school was being held in Lake County Jail Tuesday in lieu of \$2 million bail after investigators said they found illegal firearms and cocaine during a search of his home.

A Maryland grand jury in December indicted Rev. Kenneth Kurt Behrel, since 1985 rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Grayslake, on charges of sexual child abuse, said Lake County Assistant State's Atty. George Strickland.

Strickland said that from 1980 until his move to Lake County, while chaplain at St. James School, an Episcopal boarding school in western Maryland, Behrel, 51, is alleged to have repeatedly molested two male students between the ages of 12 and 16.

The allegations against Behrel, of the 300 block of Buckingham Drive, surfaced when one of the men, now in his 20s, went to authorities, Strickland said.

Maryland authorities contacted the Lake County state's attorney's office for assistance in locating and investigating Behrel, Strickland said. With help from the Grayslake Police Department, Behrel was arrested at his home Monday afternoon, he said.

A search of Behrel's residence turned up a small amount of cocaine and three firearms: a .38-caliber revolver, a .32-caliber automatic pistol and a .410-gauge shotgun, Grayslake Police Cmdr. Matt McCutcheon said.

Strickland said authorities also confiscated pornography and a computer from Behrel's home.

Behrel was subsequently charged with unlawful possession of a controlled substance, three counts of unlawful possession of a firearm without valid owner's identification and with being a fugitive from justice, McCutcheon said.

Behrel has been denied bail on the Maryland charges and faces extradition to stand trial on the sex abuse charges, Strickland said.

There have been no reports of criminal sexual misconduct involving Behrel in Illinois, McCutcheon said, but the investigation into his activities here is continuing.

Strickland said there is a day-care center at St. Andrew's Church, 31 Park Ave., and police are looking into what contact, if any, Behrel might have had with the children.

The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago released a statement Tuesday supporting a "full investigation" into the charges against Behrel and outlining its own sexual misconduct prevention program and review process.

"For nearly 10 years the diocese has conducted a thorough and ongoing training program in sexual misconduct prevention, one that has served as a model for other dioceses. The diocese is also committed to a fair and faithful ecclesiastical disciplinary process," the statement said.

Diocesan spokesman David Skidmore refused to comment on whether church officials were aware of accusations against Behrel alleging sexual misconduct or whether he has received counseling for sex abuse problems.

Skidmore said that an assistant bishop and pastoral care director for the diocese are working with lay leaders in the Grayslake parish to make arrangements for sacramental and pastoral services.

Rev. Joel Webb, assistant priest at St. Andrew's, will conduct services until other arrangements can be made, parish spokesman Michael J. Perillo Jr. said.

Behrel was ordained in Chicago in 1978 and was assistant pastor at All Saints Episcopal Church in Western Springs before being transferred to St. James, Skidmore said. Behrel received a master's of divinity degree from Nashotah House, an Episcopal seminary in Wisconsin, in 1978.

The Grayslake Police Department has asked that anyone with information about possible criminal matters involving Behrel call 847-223-2341.

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