

# Abuse charges reach military, federal courts

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The trauma of child sex abuse cases involving priests has appeared in some unusual arenas this summer, with guilty pleas in military and federal courtrooms.

Father Robert C. Hrdlicka, a Navy lieutenant and chaplain at the Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, S.C., halted his court-martial trial July 2 to plead guilty to six counts of indecent acts with a minor under 16 and one count of indecent liberties with a minor under 16.

In New York, a July 9 guilty plea by Father Edward A. Pipala to one count of transporting minors across state lines for sexual activity was believed to be the first use of the federal Mann Act against a priest.

In other developments, a grand jury in Lexington, Ky., indicted an 86-year-old retired priest on 36 felony counts of sexual abuse involving children, and a suspended priest of the Covington diocese was sentenced to three concurrent 20-year sentences after pleading guilty to molesting teen-age boys.

In Dallas, diocesan attorneys objected to a request by the attorney for Father Rudolph Kos for a change of venue in the civil lawsuit by two young men who have accused Father Kos of abusing them. Both the diocese and the priest have been sued, but they have separate attorneys.

In the military case, Father Hrdlicka, a priest of the Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., who was ordained in 1977, was sentenced to 12 years in prison after his guilty plea. He was also discharged from the Navy and forfeited all pay and allowances.

The sentence had to be reviewed by Major Gen. D.A. Richwine of Cherry Point, N.C., before it became final. Richwine's decision was expected within six weeks.

The charges against Father Hrdlicka involved four boys ranging in age from 7 to 11. The incidents of sexual abuse took place at a U.S. naval air station in Italy in 1988 and at the Beaufort base in the early 1990s.

Father Pipala, a 54-year-old priest of the New York archdiocese, had been accused of taking 11 boys from his New York parishes to a condominium in New Jersey and motels in Massachusetts for sexual activity, thus violating the Mann Act.

Mary Jo White, the U.S. attorney for the southern district of New York, said at a press conference that she did not know of any other priest ever convicted on federal child abuse charges.

Father Pipala was pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Goshen, N.Y., and associate pastor at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Monroe when the abuse occurred. It reportedly began in 1983.

He was expected to be sentenced Nov. 5 to serve six-and-a-half to eight years in prison without the possibility of parole. He said he would also plead guilty later in July to state charges of sodomy and deviant sex with a minor.

The Kentucky cases involved Monsignor Leonard B. Nienaber of Lexington and Father Earl Bierman of Covington.

Monsignor Nienaber, who was arraigned July 2 in Fayette Circuit Court, faces 31 charges of indecent or immoral practices with another and five charges of first-degree sexual abuse. Both are felonies, punishable by one to 10 years or one to five years in prison, respectively.

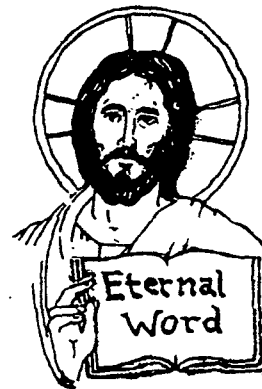
The grand jury dismissed four counts of indecent or immoral practices with another and one count of first-degree sexual abuse against Monsignor Nienaber.

The alleged incidents of sexual abuse are said to have occurred between 1964-78, when the priest was pastor of Queen of the Holy Rosary Parish in Lexington. The 24 alleged victims ranged in age from 11 to 15 at the time.

When Monsignor Nienaber was first charged in April, Lexington Bishop J. Kendrick Williams pledged to cooperate with the investigation and urged prayers for "all who are hurting during this difficult time."

Contributing to this roundup was T.F. Shaughnessy in Lexington.

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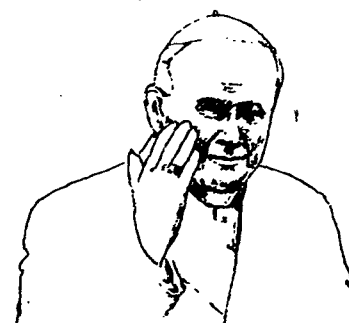
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