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4 say diocese in Worcester reneged, plan abuse suit

By Linda Matchan
GLOBE STAFF

Just last December, William Shultz, 42, of Natick said he decided to gather up his courage and confide in Worcester Bishop Timothy J. Harrington, telling him how Rev. David A. Holley had engaged him in various sexual acts when he was a 16-year-old parishioner at St. Mary of the Hills Church in Boylston.

Shultz said the bishop listened to him sympathetically during a three-hour meeting at the chancery and promised him that the diocese would "try to help me through the ordeal" and pay for any therapy he and his family members needed.

But the bishop later "reneged" on his promise, Shultz said yesterday, and informed him, through the diocese's attorney, James G. Reardon, that if he wanted compensation, he would have to sue for it.

Shultz and three other alleged victims of Father Holley plan to do just that.

"He told us that the diocese was not going to respond to any of our requests regarding therapy, and that if we wanted it we just have to get it the hard way, meaning a lawsuit," said Shultz's attorney, Matthew McNamara, who along

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PHILIP SAVIANO Says priest was "out of control."

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with attorney Roderick MacLeish Jr. is representing the men.

Today Shultz and the three others are taking that step and are planning to file a civil lawsuit in Suffolk Superior Court alleging they were sexually abused in the mid-1960s by Father Holley, a retired priest who last month pleaded guilty to molesting eight boys in New Mexico.

Unlike many other dioceses, the Worcester Diocese, the four men assert, is not reaching out to victims of sexual abuse. What's more, their suit charges, the Worcester Diocese engaged in a cover-up of Father Holley's pedophilia, shifting him "repeatedly and clandestinely" from one parish to another without warning them about his abusive past.

All of the men, in sometimes lurid detail, recount in the lawsuit how Father Holley routinely lured them into sexual acts. One of the four, Barry Navin, asserts in papers to be filed with the suit that he was once used by Father Holley to provide sexual gratification to several other priests.

The lawsuit names as defendants the Diocese of Worcester and Father Holley, who was assigned to four parishes in central Massachusetts between 1960 and 1972 before being referred for treatment for pedophilia to a Catholic-run retreat for troubled priests in New Mexico, the Order of the Paraclete treatment Center.

Father Holley was transferred from Boylston to a Worcester parish in 1968, when his superiors ordered him to seek a psychological evaluation in New Mexico. He has been accused in civil suits filed in New Mexico of sexually molesting 12 youths while Paraclete authorities assigned him to a parish in Alamogordo in the mid-1970's, and last month he pleaded guilty to molesting eight boys. He is currently undergoing a 60-day psychiatric evaluation at the New Mexico State Penitentiary.

Attorney Reardon said yesterday the Worcester Diocese would have no comment on Shultz's specific allegations or on the lawsuit in general. "We have not seen the suit papers, so we have no comment," he said. "This case is in court and . . . these contentions will be decided by a jury."

Rev. John W. Barrett, director of communications for the Worcester Diocese, said he, too, would have no comment on the civil suit, other than to say, "It is most tragic." He said it is the policy of the Worcester Diocese to "try to assist victims in every

Four to sue priest, Worcester diocese alleging abuse

way possible, with whatever needs they have. We try to meet with them and be of assistance." Asked whether this also included financial assistance, Father Barrett replied, "I have no idea."

McNamara said none of the other three men bringing the lawsuit — Philip Saviano of Jamaica Plain, Paul F. Roughan of Worcester, and Navin of Worcester — has been offered any form of assistance from the Worcester Diocese.

"They never contacted me or anybody in my family," said Saviano, who first went public with his allegations in December. "They may have a policy but they are not upholding it."

The Worcester response stands in marked contrast to that of the Archdiocese of Boston and the Diocese of Fall River, which have been forced to revisit their sexual abuse policies recently in light of allegations of sexual misconduct by priests. Both, for example, have offered financial compensation to victims for mental health costs and have extended pastoral counseling to victims and their families.

The lawsuit scheduled to be filed today in Suffolk Superior Court describes multiple acts of sexual abuse, allegedly performed by Father Holley while he served as a priest in East Douglas and Boylston. The suit alleges, in one man's case, that Father Holley habitually showed groups of young boys pornographic books and playing cards; and in another man's case, that he brought a 13-year-old boy in Boylston to a church-run weekend retreat where he held the boy out "as a kind of sex toy" and forced him to be "fellated by four or five other Roman Catholic priests."

Saviano, who alleges he was molested repeatedly by Father Holley as an 11-year-old at St. Denis' Catholic church in East Douglas, said the priest was "so out of control" that he once masturbated in front of a window in broad daylight while engaging Saviano in conversation.

In interviews yesterday, three of the four men said they are bringing the lawsuit in the hope that eventually the diocese will develop a strong policy to deal with sexual abusers, and because they want access to Father Holley's personnel records. The lawsuit charges that Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan, who oversaw the Worcester Diocese at the time, transferred Father Holley to different parishes "and failed to disclose Father Holley's history of pedophilia to each new parish."

The fourth man, Navin, was unavailable yesterday.

"There has been a major cover-up on this as far as the diocese is concerned," Shultz said. "They have never accepted responsibility for this man."

"I'm not real happy about talking about my childhood sex life with a priest," Saviano said. "But I think what the diocese is saying is that we will have to force them to take responsibility for this, through the courts."