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# Priest accused of misconduct has strong New Bedford ties

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NEW BEDFORD — One of the two Roman Catholic priests put on administrative leave for alleged misconduct has strong ties to New Bedford.

Fr. Daniel W Lacroix grew up in the city and attended St. Mary's Parish and the accompanying school as a child, according to a profile on the priest by The Standard-Times when in 2017 he returned to be the pastor of the parish where he grew up. This year, Lacroix was named co-pastor at three North End Churches — St. Joseph-St. Therese, St. Mary, and Our Lady of Fatima Parishes — before being placed on administrative leave.

In the profile Lacroix said, "I never thought I would be so blessed as to return to St. Mary's," and explained that it's very rare for a priest to be assigned to his home parish.

Lacroix was ordained a priest in 1988 and over the past three decades he was assigned to Holy Name Parish in New Bedford, St. Patrick Parish in Wareham, and St. Francis Xavier Parish in Acushnet, along with parishes in Chatham, Mansfield, Hyannis, and Seekonk, according Director of Communications for the Fall River Diocese John Kearns.

In 2016, Lacroix was named dean of the New Bedford district which, according to the Fall River Diocese website, means the bishop appointed Lacroix to assist him in the promotion of coordination of apostolic and pastoral activity in that area.

There are 5 deans within the Fall River Diocese and Kearns said Lacroix has temporarily been removed from that role as part of his administrative leave.

During his leave, Kearns said LaCroix is not allowed to stay on any parish affiliated property, but there are provisions for his compensation while he's on leave.

In a press release sent out Sunday, Kearns wrote that the alleged misconduct is said to have occurred decades ago and both priests have denied the allegations.

On Sunday, Lacroix posted a statement to his private Facebook page, which he gave the Standard-Times permission to use.

The statement said, "an independent audit found a memo or note of alleged misconduct during the early part of my ministry. I want all to hear it from me that 'I have not engaged in any sexual activity with anyone during my years of seminary or into the priesthood.'"

Lacroix goes on to say that he is confident God knows that truth and the truth will come out in this world or the next.

When reached for comment, Lacroix said he couldn't comment further because of the District Attorney investigation, but did say he has received hundreds of messages of support.

The decision to investigate two local priests for alleged misconduct came as the Fall River Diocese is developing a list of clergy against whom a credible allegation of abuse of a minor has been made in the past, Kearns said.

Lacroix, along with Father Richard E. Degagne, was placed on administrative leave after an external review of the Diocese's personnel files and "information came forth about these two priests required further investigation," Kearns said.

At the beginning of January, Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha announced in a letter that William Gavin, an experienced compliance auditor and former FBI assistant director, had recently begun "an in-depth review of all records of the Diocese pertaining to the abuse or allegations of abuse of a minor by any cleric in the Diocese."

Since then, the firm Kinsale Management Consulting has succeeded Gavin, Kearns said, and Kinsale has done similar reviews for other dioceses.

“A list is still forthcoming,” Kearns said, referring to the list of clergy with credible allegations of abuse of a minor.

The allegations of alleged misconduct have been referred to the Bristol County and Cape & Islands District Attorney’s office, according to Kearns’s press release.

Gregg Miliote, a spokesperson for the Bristol County DA’s office, said “We have received materials from the diocese and the matter is under review,” but he could not comment any further.

Over the weekend, a letter from Bishop da Cunha was read at all weekend Masses at the parishes where LaCroix was a co-pastor and Kearns said the diocese provided counselors and social workers at the Masses as well in case any parishioners needed their support.

Since St. Mary also has an associate school, now known as All Saints Catholic School, parents and guardians and faculty and staff received a letter Bishop da Cunha via email, Kearns said.

The school serves preschool through Grade 8 students from the Greater New Bedford community, according to its website.

A parent whose student attends the school and preferred not to be identified said, “The way it seemed was the diocese was fully aware of the situation (the alleged misconduct) and he was still assigned to (a church with a school). It baffles me...It’s troubling that the administration kept this from the parents.”

The Standard-Times did reach out to All Saints, but they deferred to the Fall River Diocese on the matter.

In his 2018 profile in The Standard-Times, the topic of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church did come up and Lacroix said the Church was working to change the way it does things and “There have been cases of sexual abuse in many professions — sports coaches, even doctors — ever since the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s. Like almost anything, a few bad apples can tarnish the reputation of all.”