

# Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield reaches settlement, adds another name to its list of priests accused of sexual abuse



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**UPDATE, March 29, 2016, 9:52 p.m.:** New details emerge about abusive priest's history with Springfield Catholic diocese

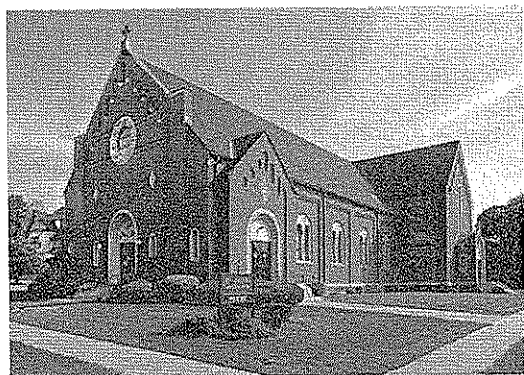
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SPRINGFIELD — The Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield has added a new name to its list of priests accused of sex abuse, acknowledging that the Rev. Paul Archambault's suicide was likely prompted by a confrontation over abuse allegations that led to a court settlement.

Archambault was 42 when he **fatally shot himself with his own handgun at Our Lady of Sacred Heart rectory** on Rosewell Street on July 3, 2011. It was a Sunday afternoon. His body was discovered by his brother in a closet after he missed a scheduled Mass at a church in Hampden, according to police records. He had not left a note.

The suicide, just six years after Archambault was ordained by former Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell, prompted an outpouring of shock and grief in the Catholic community. Church officials are now attributing the suicide to allegations of sexual abuse.

Two years after his death, Archambault was named in a lawsuit filed in Hampshire Superior Court by a 20-year-old Chesterfield man who said Archambault began sexually abusing him at 13.



## **Chesterfield man files sexual assault suit against Springfield Roman Catholic Diocese**

Also named as a defendant is "Father R," the pastor at St. Patrick who was known to the congregation as "Father Rick," the suit states.

## **DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD**

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The complaint alleged Archambault began cultivating the boy's friendship while the priest was assigned to the former St. Patrick's Parish in Chicopee. The victim said the cleric sexually assaulted him for nearly four years at the parish, at a shrine to the Virgin Mary in Vermont and at the Northampton home of the priest's father.

A statement released by the diocese Tuesday said Archambault knew the victim's family personally for many years before his ordination.

Neither the lawsuit nor the comments issued by the diocese name the victim; and, as a matter of policy, The Republican does not name victims of sexual assault. The case had been scheduled to go to trial earlier this year, but instead was resolved through a settlement. The terms of that settlement have not been disclosed.

However, Archambault's name will be added to the diocese's running list of accused priests, published on its website.

John Connor, a lawyer for the victim, said adding Archambault's name to the list is a necessary step for the diocese.

"To the extent that there may be anybody else out there who may have been harmed by this person, that's crucial," Connor said.

The plaintiff's attorney added that he believes the diocese ignored warning signs from the late priest regarding his tendencies toward certain children.

"There were a lot of red flags and a lot of indicators that this priest's behavior around young children was a problem," Connor said. "A number of parishioners raised concerns with the diocese that this individual had 'boundary issues' with children."

In response, Dupont said concerns were raised about Archambault's behavior and investigated including by a private eye hired by the diocese.

"Nothing came to light that was actionable. No victims came forward to us. Father Archambault was made aware of the concerns raised," he said.



Historically, it has been the local church's policy to resist including the names of dead priests, much to the chagrin of activists. But, diocesan spokesman Mark Dupont said the diocese made an exception because of the special circumstances of this case.

"Based on the legal filings in this case, it now appears that after being confronted with these allegations in 2011, Rev. Archambault took his own life. In light of this, the Diocese of Springfield now recognizes this victim's allegation as credible," Dupont wrote in a statement.

Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski also offered a statement.

"Today I have added the late Fr. Paul Archambault's name to the list of clergy with credible allegations of abuse. This is yet another sad reminder of the pain and tragedy caused by these deliberate acts, which not only cause such tremendous harm to victims, their families and close acquaintances but also violates the trust of our people and impugns the integrity of the majority of clergy and religious who faithfully minister in the Catholic Church," his statement reads.

It continues: "I want to extend to all victims my sincere apology for what they had to endure. I want to assure them and the entire community of my fervent resolve to continue to address this terrible plague upon our Church through our ongoing screening, education and awareness efforts."

In addition to Archambault, the list includes 16 priests – some former, some defrocked – and one deacon. It has been many years since

the diocese has added a new priest, Dupont said.

It has been eight years since the local diocese settled the last in a wave of multimillion-dollar lawsuits that began in the 1990s.

Dozens of the lawsuits accused Richard Lavigne, a notorious former priest who also was the prime suspect in the 1972 murder of altar boy Danny Croteau. His killing remains unsolved.

Dupont said the diocese knows of no other allegations of sexual abuse related to Archambault. Nonetheless, the church will send special notices to five parishes where Archambault had been assigned.

"We are also asking parishes where Rev. Archambault was assigned, or conducted ministry, to issue a direct notification alerting those communities as to this finding," the statement reads.

Those parishes include Holy Name of Jesus in Chicopee; St. Mary's in Hampden; Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Northampton; St. Theresa in South Hadley; and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Springfield.

"We urge all victims of abuse, or those who may have knowledge of abuse, to always report these concerns to the appropriate law enforcement and child protective service agencies," Dupont said.

The diocese established the list of accused priests along with sweeping policies to identify alleged victims and offer counseling to those whom they deemed to have credible allegations. It also implemented new training protocols and screening for all its lay employees and volunteers.

Many of these reforms followed the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops convened in Dallas in 2002 specifically to address the clergy abuse crisis dominating the international church at the time.

Archambault's history with the Springfield Diocese suggests there were some early bumps in the road for the young priest.

After little more than a year at his first assignment in South Hadley, he took a leave of absence for almost a year, according to diocesan records. He spent five months at the Sacred Heart Friary in Waltham before returning to parishes in Chicopee and Hampden in 2007. He took up residence at the Springfield parish in 2009 and served as the chaplain at the Hampden Police Department and Baystate Medical Center, according to the diocese.



#### **Fellow priests remember Father Paul Archambault as a "wounded healer"**

Rev. John Lessard, Archambault's long-time friend, said the late priest was "a victim of terrible bullying all his life."

During Archambault's funeral Mass, a fellow priest and longtime friend said Archambault was a charismatic, kind but troubled soul.

"He was a wounded healer," the Rev. John Lessard said during a eulogy.

The diocese maintains a confidential phone line to report allegations of sexual abuse: 1-800-842-9055

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**2016 List of Accused Priests**

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