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Plymouth pastor placed on leave after sexual abuse charge

Alleged incident from early 1980s

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 13, 2012

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The longtime pastor of a Roman Catholic parish in Plymouth has been placed on leave after church leaders said they received an allegation that he sexually abused a child in the early 1980s, when he was assigned to a different location.

The Archdiocese of Boston announced yesterday that the Rev. James E. Braley, 62, pastor of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Parish since 2001, will remain on leave pending the outcome of an internal investigation by the archdiocese, which immediately informed law enforcement after receiving the allegation.

Nearly all of Braley's assignments over the last 37 years have been in Massachusetts, including chaplain to

Archbishop Williams High School in Braintree (1981-86) and associate pastor at St. Peter Parish in Cambridge (1975-81), according to Kellyanne Dignan, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese.

Dignan said church officials notified the state attorney general's office and the local district attorney's office of the allegations, but she declined to give details of the allegation.

"To protect the privacy of the individual who came forward and to preserve the integrity of the investigation, I cannot provide any additional information about the allegation we received," Dignan said.

Melissa Karpinsky, a spokeswoman for the state attorney general's office, said she did not know whether the office had been notified of the allegation.

Cara O'Brien, a spokeswoman for Middlesex County District Attorney Gerard T. Leone, whose jurisdiction includes Cambridge, said that office is reviewing the referral from the archdiocese. She declined to comment further about the matter. David Traub, spokesman for the Norfolk district attorney's office, which oversees Braintree, said his office had not received notification of new allegations. Nor had the Plymouth district attorney's office or Plymouth police, according to Assistant District Attorney Bridget Norton Middleton.

Braley's leave bars him from ministering or presenting himself publicly as a priest, Dignan said. He also can no longer live at the rectory. He will receive his full pay pending the outcome, she said.

Braley, known as Father Jim, was the third pastor at the Plymouth parish, said longtime town resident Ann Wollman, an active parishioner since its founding in 1982.

"I can't believe it," Wollman said after hearing of the news from archdiocese officials. "It's got to be wrong. All I can say is it just doesn't sound like the person that I know."

Other parishioners and parish staff declined to comment or return calls seeking comment yesterday.

Since his ordination in May 1975 at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, Braley's assignments have included: St. James in Salem (1986-90); St. Mary in Lynn (1990-94); Our Lady Star of Sea in Marblehead

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'I can't believe it. It's got to be wrong.'

Ann Wollman, longtime parishioner about the allegation against the Rev. James E. Braley

(1994); St. Catherine of Siena in Norwood (1994-2000); and participation in the Priestly Renewal Program at Vatican II Institute in California (2000-01).

The Rev. William G. Williams, pastor of St. Peter Parish in Plymouth, has been named administrator in Braley's absence and will be assisted by the Rev. Jack Schatzel, the pastor emeritus of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the archdiocese said.

"We remain committed to doing everything possible to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people in our parishes and institutions," Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley said in statement. "I am very grateful to Bishop John Dooher, who on my behalf visited the parishioners of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Parish to offer prayers and support. I know the faithful and the clergy of the archdiocese join me in this pledge of prayerful support."

The archdiocese said it continues to make counseling and other services available to victims, their families, and parishes affected by clergy sexual abuse.

The support office can be reached at 781-794-2581.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com.

Correction: Because of information provided to the Globe, an earlier version of this story gave an incorrect description of the Rev. James E. Braley's pay while he is on leave.

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