

Weather  
Today: Partly sunny, rain  
late. High 48. Low 42.  
Wednesday: Cloudy, rain.  
High 60. Low 36.  
Details: Page B8

# The Washington Post

FINAL

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## N.H. Prosecutors Report Diocese Ignored Sex Abuse

### Bishops Were Culpable, State Says

By PAMELA FERDINAND  
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Washington Post Staff Writers

CONCORD, N.H., March 3—For years the Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester was “willfully blind” to pedophile priests, making no effort to restrict or monitor their activities even after they admitted sexual misconduct, prosecutors said today in a public report on a 10-month grand jury investigation.

The 154-page report placed responsibility squarely on New Hampshire’s bishops, saying decisions to reassign offending priests “were always made at the top.” It also said that diocesan officials “made apparently false statements” in civil lawsuits and that, on at least one occasion, the diocese used a confidential out-of-court settlement to keep a victim from speaking to law enforcement authorities.

“The most troubling aspect of this whole case is that this conduct went on for such a long time, under a veil of secrecy,” Senior Assistant Attorney General N. William Delker said in releasing the report. “By doing so, it harmed many, many children.”

The diocese, which covers all of New Hampshire, averted an indictment by agreeing in December that it would likely have been convicted of child endangerment. As part of the agreement, Bishop John B. McCormack promised stringent efforts to prevent sexual abuse and allowed 9,000 pages of investigative, legal and church files on 43 priests and members of religious orders to be made public today.

Had the case gone forward, the state attorney general’s office “was prepared to prove that the Diocese consciously chose to protect itself and its priests from scandal, lawsuits, and criminal charges instead of protecting the minor parishioners under its care from continued sexual abuse by priests,” the report said. The diocese “exhibited a ‘flagrant indifference’ to its obliga-

tions to protect children by engaging in a ‘conscious course of deliberate ignorance,’” it added.

In a written response, McCormack said the diocese “offers no excuses for its past actions.”

“The Diocese never intended to cause harm to any person,” he said. “On behalf of myself and leaders of the Church in New Hampshire—past and present—we are sorry for our failures, but most of all we are sorry for the harm done to persons who were abused by priests and to the Catholic faithful who have been scandalized.”

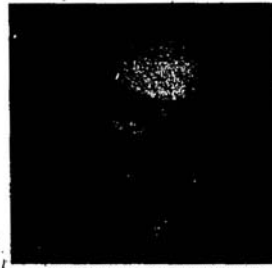
This is the second time this year that a grand jury investigation into sexual abuse by priests has resulted in a caustic public report rather than indictments. Prosecutors in Suffolk County, N.Y., last month detailed decades of abuse, secrecy and legal hardball tactics in the diocese of Rockville Centre on Long Island but said the statute of limitations prevented the filing of charges.

The agreement in New Hampshire averted charges against the diocese but not against individual priests. Most recently, the Rev. Joseph Maguire was indicted Feb. 20 on charges of sexual assault.

The report detailed the careers of eight New Hampshire priests accused of molesting children over four decades. They included the Rev. Paul Aube, 61, who told prosecutors last year that church officials had insisted he continue working with children in the 1970s even after he admitted abuse and asked for help. He was accused of taking four boys on a road trip to Indiana for six weeks—a journey one alleged victim described as a “rape fest.” Aube was placed on administrative leave in 1994.

In some cases, the report said, the diocese took steps to address allegations, including sending priests for counseling. However, the steps were so ineffective that the diocese could still be considered to have “knowingly” endangered children, it said.

The investigation also found



Robert Densmore is one of eight priests named in the report.



Raymond Laferriere, above, is another of the priests named.



Also named is former priest Gordon MacRae, shown leaving a Keene, N.H., courthouse after a 1994 conviction for molesting an altar boy.

cases in which the diocese “had reason to suspect” that a child was being sexually abused but did not inform civil authorities. Prosecutors said they found no evidence that McCormack had kept offenders in ministry since he became bishop in 1998.

In its response, the diocese said it did not “necessarily agree” with the state’s conclusions and could have mounted a vigorous defense, but “the Diocese believed that even a successful defense would not diminish the significant and serious harm suffered by minors. . . . It was in this spirit that the Diocese made the acknowledgements it did in the Agree-

ment.” Some New Hampshire Catholics, however, said the church did not go far enough. James Farrell, a University of New Hampshire professor and leading critic of McCormack, said the diocese’s response provided “only ambiguity, misdirection, euphemism and vague generalities.”

“We are still left with questions of who knew about abuse by priests? Who assigned and re-assigned known abusers? Who failed to report crimes against children?” he said.

Cooperman reported from Washington.