

# Priest's arrest stuns some

But others say he has a trail of strange behavior

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STAFF WRITERS

While parishioners at Holy Trinity Church in Webster expressed shock at the Rev. Eugene Emo's arrest on sex abuse charges, others who remember him from previous assignments said they were not surprised.

They said the charming priest had an affinity for teen-age boys that made some of his young parishioners uncomfortable.

But that discomfort rarely made its way out into the open as Emo was transferred from parish to parish, holding more than a dozen different pastoral posts in 30-odd years.

Ronald Holdraker, who served as an altar boy at St. Cecilia Church in Irondequoit in the 1960s, recalled that Emo befriended him and other teen-age boys.

"He'd invite them to the family cabin, but there was no family there," Holdraker said. "There were four or five of us at a time. We thought it was something special, being the chosen ones."

He said the boys would do chores around the property during the day, then sit around a fireplace in the evening.

"He'd start to wrestle us," Holdraker said. "He would grab me and wrestle and he wouldn't let up. It would go on for 15 minutes or a half hour at a time. I felt uncomfortable about it."

He said the boys were always clothed and he was never sexually contacted.

"He would grab your crotch, but he would do it in a wrestling way, so you didn't think much of it," Holdraker said. "If you complained, he would just say, 'Remember, I'm a priest.'"

But Webster Mayor Wilbur "Deke" Beh, who attends Mass every morning at Holy Trinity, said he was stunned by the news.

"It was totally out of the blue to me, and I'm an active parishioner," he said. "It just proves everybody's human, including a priest."

Parishioners in Webster describe Emo as articulate and well-read with a great sense of humor.

"The first Sunday he was here, he probably gave the best homily I had ever heard," Beh said.

"He has a wealth of knowledge about a lot of things and could explain stuff to you," one parishioner said.

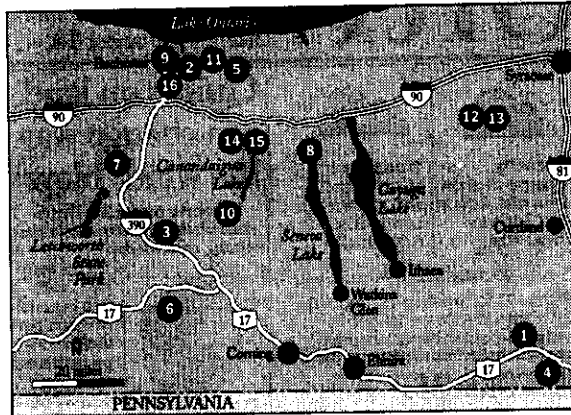
"I was just flabbergasted," one woman said. "I just can't fathom it."

A spokesman for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, a 2,800-member support group based in Chicago, said the

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## Priest's assignments

The Rev. Eugene G. Emo was ordained in 1961. Map shows a list of his assignments.



1. June 1961: Assistant Pastor, St. Patrick Church, Owego, Tioga County.
2. June 1963: Assistant Pastor, St. Cecilia Church, 2732 Culver Road, Irondequoit.
3. June 1965: Assistant Pastor, St. Mary Church, Dansville.
4. June 1973: Assistant Pastor, St. Margaret-Mary Church, Apalachin, Tioga County.
5. June 1974: Associate Pastor, St. Michael Church, Newark, Wayne County.
6. June 1975: Chaplain, St. James Mercy Hospital, Hornell, Steuben County.
7. June 1982: Pastor, St. Mary Church, Geneseo, Livingston County.
8. October 1982: Associate Pastor, St. Francis DeSales, Geneva.
9. June 1987: Parochial Vicar, Holy Rosary, 414 Lexington Ave.
10. October 1987: Pastor, St. Januarius, Naples, Ontario County.
- August 1993: Placed on administrative leave.
11. June 1994: Returns from administrative leave and resides at Holy Trinity, 1460 Ridge Road, Webster. Serves assistant with liturgies and sacramental celebrations.
12. October 1994: Part-time chaplain at Mercy Health and Rehabilitation Center, Auburn, Cayuga County.
- October 1994: Placed on limited assignment.
13. December 1994: Resigns as part-time chaplain of Mercy Health.
14. January 1995: Part-time chaplain at the Canandaigua Veterans Affairs Medical Center.
15. June 1995: Full-time chaplain at the V.A. hospital.
- Jan. 31, 1996: Implicated in alleged sexual abuse and placed on administrative leave from Holy Trinity. Also resigns as chaplain of the V.A. Hospital.
16. Feb. 16, 1996: Arrested at Blessed Sacrament in Rochester and charged with second-degree sexual abuse for an alleged incident in Steuben County.

SOURCE: Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester

BRYAN WITTMAN staff artist

shock felt by parishioners upon learning of an arrest is typical.

"They shouldn't feel alone," said David Clohessy, SPAN's national director. "We hear that all the time. To rob a bank, you need a weapon. To molest a kid, you need charm and charisma and all the rest. They are the same traits that enable them access to kids. The reason they get by with it so many years is because they appear to be very charismatic and charming."

Dr. Richard Sipe, a psychotherapist at Johns Hopkins University and a former Catholic priest, said 6 percent of Catholic priests get sexually involved with minors. Comparative studies among other denominations or the general public have not been done, he said.

Sipe, who wrote *Sex, Priests and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis*, said there have been 800 cases of Catholic priests who have been charged

with sex offenses and 1,300 priests who underwent treatment for sexual problems in the past 10 years.

"Sexual abuse by professional people is always a violation of power," Sipe said. "It's an abuse of power, even if the subject seems compliant."

In Naples, Ontario County, few members of the congregation at St. Januarius Church were surprised to learn of Emo's arrest.

"We've known for some time that Father Emo is a man who has a very serious problem," said David Scheible, a member of the St. Januarius parish council.

Scheible and other members of the Naples church said yesterday that Emo left town "suddenly and mysteriously" in the midst of allegations of financial and sexual improprieties and that diocese officials never explained their reasons for the transfer.

"Father Robert Ring (director of Diocese personnel) came down here and he said an awful lot, but he didn't tell us anything," Scheible said. "It was just a lot of under-the-rug sweeping."

Diocese spokeswoman Liz Brown said last night that Emo was removed from Naples in 1993 because "it was clear there were some personal issues, some inappropriate behavior, and he needed to be evaluated and treated."

Brown said she didn't know if Emo had been relieved of ministerial duty at other locations because of similar problems.

"I'm not privy to personnel records," Brown said.

Scheible said the priest was removed from St. Januarius after the parish committee discovered church funds missing and Emo "tried to cover up" for young male church members believed to have stolen the money.

A church committee confronted Emo and asked the Diocese to step in when a cleaning lady found handcuffs and photographs of young men in the church rectory, Scheible said.

Scheible, who was head of the church's finance committee, said Emo "lied to me" when confronted about the missing church funds.

"Father Emo is educated in psychology and he can snow an awful lot of people," Scheible said. "But this is a terrible thing for the Diocese, and I'm just going to pray for the man."

Christopher Casey, also a member of the parish council, said the church was at "its all-time low-point" in the months before Emo was removed three years ago.

Casey said it's "unfortunate" that the Diocese "just cloistered him away for awhile" without assuring that Emo had received adequate counseling and treatment.

Scheible, Casey and other church members, including former Naples Supervisor Michael Robinson, yesterday criticized Diocese authorities for failing to "be honest" with parishioners about Emo's suspected problems in 1993.

"It's just too bad this thing wasn't headed off years ago," Scheible said.

"When Father Emo first came to Naples, he did a lot of great things for the parish and we thought 'This guy's all right,'" Robinson said.

Robinson said the charges against Emo and recent highly publicized child abuse scandals involving priests in other parts of the country are a powerful argument against the Catholic Church's requirement that priests remain unmarried and celibate.

Scheible agrees.

"If a priest breaks his vows with a woman, he's out of the priesthood," Scheible said. "But if they play around with children or with another man, they just get transferred to another parish. This is a scandal in the church and in society today that's just beyond my comprehension. It's Satan at work." □