

Des Moines Register

ST. THERESA'S PARISH

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Priest accused of sexually harassing students

An associate pastor at a parish in Des Moines is suspended while the diocese investigates.

By **EDDIE BAEB**
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A Des Moines priest has been suspended with pay after being accused of sexually harassing four female students of St. Theresa's

School, church officials said.

Tan Tran, 37, an associate pastor at St. Theresa's Parish at 1230 Merle Hay Road, was suspended Tuesday, officials said.

Monsignor Lawrence Beeson, the diocese's vicar general, said the allegations were raised by several girls after they learned in school about sexual harassment. The girls "began to realize that some of the things that had happened to them with Father Tran fit into that definition of sexual harassment" they had learned about, Beeson said.

He said the allegations didn't involve sexual acts or remarks. "This falls into the category of the uneasy feeling that comes from the unnecessary patting and hugging," Beeson said. He said the students believed that Tran's conduct was sexual harassment and that it made them feel uncomfortable.

He would not disclose the girls' ages, but he said the school includes first through eighth grade.

Beeson said the girls reported that the incidents happened at the church. He said school officials are

waiting to see if any other students come forward with similar complaints.

Police weren't notified and no criminal charges have been filed, Beeson said.

But Tom Chapman, a spokesman for the diocese, said church leaders are aggressively investigating.

"One thing you'll find nationwide is that the church has learned along with society the generally better ways of dealing with these things," Chapman said. "Any diocese will take these allegations

very seriously. It's not anything that will be swept under the rug."

Tran could not be reached by telephone Wednesday night.

Beeson said Tran had not made a statement in response to the allegations. Chapman said he was "pretty sure" Tran would not want to talk to reporters.

Beeson said that after the investigation is complete, Bishop Joseph Charron will decide whether Tran may return to the ministry, and if so, in what capacity.

Tran was ordained in June 1992.