

Church court defrocks New York priest after finding him guilty of abuse

NEW YORK – A Vatican court has found a suspended New York archdiocesan priest, Charles M. Kavanagh, guilty of sexually abusing a minor in the late 1970s and has dismissed him from the clerical state.

“Although all of this took place before my arrival as archbishop, I am well aware of the seriousness of the charges involved in this case, and I am grateful for the careful way that it has been handled by my predecessor, Cardinal (Edward M.) Egan, and by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,” New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan said in a Dec. 17 statement.

“I would like to take this occasion to renew our apologies to all those who have been harmed by the sin and crime of sexual abuse, and in particular to apologize to the gentleman who was the victim in this case,” he said. “It is my prayer that the resolution of this case will bring a sense of peace and consolation to all who have been affected by this tragic situation.”

The abuse occurred when Kavanagh, now 73, was a monsignor and rector of Cathedral Preparatory Seminary in Manhattan during the late 1970s and early '80s. His accuser, former student Daniel Donohue, now 46, did not come forward until mid-May 2002.

Kavanagh has denied that he sexually abused Donohue but said the two had a close relationship. The New York Times reported Dec. 17 that a family spokesman said the former priest had no comment on the court's decision, which cannot be appealed.

After serving as rector, the former priest became a popular parish pastor. In 1994, he was named vicar of development for the archdiocese by the late Cardinal John O'Connor of New York.

In 2002, the abuse allegation against Kavanagh came to light by way of a letter from

Donohue, who had already submitted his accusation to the Manhattan District Attorney, according to the New York Archdiocese.

When he learned of the accusation, Cardinal Egan launched a preliminary investigation as required by the policies of the U.S. bishops and the archdiocese. He also promptly removed then-Monsignor Kavanagh's priestly faculties and told him he could not engage in active ministry or in any way present himself as a priest.

According to the archdiocese, between July 2002 and July 2003, the District Attorney's office worked closely with archdiocesan officials and investigated the allegation. The office informed Cardinal Egan it felt the allegation was credible.

At the same time, the independent Archdiocesan Advisory Review Board conducted its own investigation and concluded the allegation was credible and recommended to the cardinal that Kavanagh not be returned to ministry.

As required by church law, the case was then referred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which ordered the canonical trial at the request of Kavanagh.

Conducted outside the jurisdiction of the New York Archdiocese in 2004, the trial found Kavanagh guilty and dismissed him from the clerical state. Kavanagh then requested the decision be reviewed by a church appellate court, also outside the jurisdiction of the archdiocese. That court upheld the lower court's decision.