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## Today's Top Story

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### Girl claims rape by priest

By Anita Perkins  
*Eagle-Tribune Writer*

HAVERHILL -- A former priest at All Saints Parish is behind bars, accused of raping a 15-year-old girl on church property.

Police and prosecutors say the Rev. Kelvin E. Iguabita, 33, made sexual advances and engaged in sexual acts with the teen-ager over a four-month period starting in July 2000.



Kelvin E. Iguabita (left), a former priest at All Saints Church, stands in the prisoner's box during his arraignment yesterday in Haverhill District Court. His lawyer, Joseph F. Gannon, tries to shield his client from cameras in the courtroom.

Iguabita, of 2 Park Lane, Gloucester, was arrested Monday at 7 p.m. at the Haverhill Police Station. Police said he showed up at the station on his own after hearing there were warrants for his arrest. When he heard the charges, police said, he appeared "a little shocked" but was cooperative.

However, authorities said that after learning of the allegations but before turning himself in, Iguabita twice tried to contact the girl by telephone. Her father would not allow him to speak to her, authorities said.

Iguabita, who sometimes used his mother's name of Rodriguez, was held overnight at the Haverhill

police lockup.

In an affidavit, the girl, now 17, said the priest touched her

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In an affidavit, the girl, now 17, said the priest touched her, kissed her and said he wanted to have sex with her or marry her and ultimately committed two sexual acts on her.

"I tried to get him off the subject -- he kept going back," the girl said in the affidavit, describing one encounter when she says the priest asked for sex.

On one occasion, the priest stopped a sexual assault when he went to hear confessions and say Mass.

"I felt powerless and disgust," the girl said of another incident. "I thought it was wrong. Part of me questioned that it was wrong. At no time did I think it was right. Part of me wanted to go along with him because he was my priest."

Dressed in a long, dark coat, suit and tie and white shirt, Iguabita stood behind his lawyer in the prisoner's box during his arraignment yesterday at Haverhill District Court. A slight man, at 5-feet-8 and 135 pounds, he pleaded innocent to two counts of rape of a child with force and one count of assault with intent to rape. Police said rape with force means the act was done against the victim's will.

Prosecutors said details of the abuse surfaced when the girl sought counseling last year. The alleged abuse took place on church property between August and December 2000, according to Assistant District Attorney John M. DePaulo.

At the time, Iguabita was director of the parish's Catholic Youth Organization.

Iguabita, a native of Colombia who came to the United States seven years ago, was being held this morning at Essex County Correctional Institute in Middleton on \$15,000 cash bail. Haverhill District Court Judge Kevin Herlihy imposed the bail based on DePaulo's argument that Iguabita is not a United States citizen and has no family or other ties in the area. DePaulo also expressed concerns that Iguabita had called the alleged victim's family twice seeking to talk to the girl.

Joseph F. Gannon, who is representing Iguabita, did not know whether Iguabita will be able to make bail. "He certainly doesn't have it in his pocket," he said, following the arraignment. If he posts bail, Iguabita must turn in his passport and stay away from the alleged victim.

During yesterday's arraignment, Gannon referred to Iguabita as an ex-priest. But a spokesman for the Boston Archdiocese

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said the priest is on a leave of absence. The archdiocese and Gannon refused to give a reason for Iguabita's leave of absence, which began on July 18, 2001.

After ordination on May 15, 1999, Iguabita was briefly assigned to the Metropolitan Tribunal, which acts on marriage annulments for the Archdiocese of Boston. He served as a parochial vicar at All Saints Parish from June 1, 1999, to June 5, 2001, when he returned briefly to the Metropolitan Tribunal.

After going on leave as a priest last July, Iguabita took a job at a group home for handicapped people in Lawrence. Although the operator of the group home, Vinfen Corp., knew that Iguabita was a former priest, a spokesman said the company was not told about the reason for his leave of absence and was unaware of the criminal investigation.

"I'm quite shocked about this," said Kathryn Cutshall of Vinfen in Haverhill. "He's a very nice man. It's hard for me to believe these charges." She said Iguabita was employed as a programmer at the group home.

A spokesman for the Archdiocese, Donna M. Morrissey, said the church was not aware of the allegations when Iguabita took his leave of absence. The Archdiocese also did not know that he took a job in a group home, she said.

Iguabita, who speaks fluent Spanish and worked for two years as a missionary in Colombia, is due back in court Feb. 6.

Iguabita's arrest comes at a time when the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston is in the spotlight over its handling of allegations of sexual abuse against priests.

A former priest, John J. Geoghan, went on trial in Middlesex Superior Court this week on charges of molesting a 10-year-old boy in 1991. Geoghan, who was defrocked in 1998, also faces two additional criminal trials in Suffolk County and 84 civil lawsuits. He has been accused of molesting more than 130 boys during the three decades he served in Boston-area parishes.

Last week, Cardinal Bernard Law apologized to Geoghan's alleged victims and ordered clergy and volunteers to report allegations of abuse against minors. The Archdiocese of Boston will have "zero tolerance" for sexual abuse by priests, he said.

Yesterday, the Archdiocese issued a statement asking anyone with information about Iguabita's alleged misconduct to contact the state Department of Social Services, which investigates child abuse. Haverhill police said anyone with additional information about the case may also contact detectives. Detective Jackie Ouellette is handling the investigation.

Church leaders learned of the allegations against Iguabita after being contacted by a "mandated reporter" working for the alleged victim, according to Haverhill Police Sgt. John P. Arahovites Jr. Mandated reporters include professionals such as teachers, counselors and police officers.

As a result of the charges, Iguabita will not be given any assignment in the Archdiocese pending the outcome of the criminal charges and a formal review, according to a news release from the Archdiocese.

The Archdiocese also pledged cooperation with authorities investigating Iguabita and said it is offering pastoral support to the parish and school communities in Haverhill.

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