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### McCormack says active priest admitted relationship

Sunday, September 29, 2002

By J.M. HIRSCH  
AP Associated Press

MANCHESTER - In a deposition, Bishop John McCormack said he assigned the Rev. Roland Cote to a Jaffrey church after Cote admitted having a sexual relationship with a teenage boy years earlier, a witness at the deposition said.

McCormack said the case wasn't prosecuted because authorities could not determine the youth's exact age at the time of the alleged sex, which was about 15 years ago, according to Rodney Ford, who sat in on the closed deposition.

At McCormack's direction, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester bars priests from active ministry in New Hampshire if they are the subject of credible allegations of sexual misconduct with a minor.

McCormack spokesman Patrick McGee said the diocese defines a minor as anyone under 18. Given the uncertainty about the boy's age, that would make McCormack's assignment of Cote to Jaffrey this spring a possible violation of McCormack's own policy.

McGee, however, said there was no violation because the diocese's independent review board determined the allegation against Cote was not credible. McGee would not comment further, and Cote did not return telephone messages seeking comment.

Cote recently told the *Monadnock Ledger* the allegations were baseless.

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McCormack's deposition was on an unrelated case, a civil lawsuit filed in Massachusetts by several men who say they were molested by the Rev. Paul Shanley during the 1980s.

Ford, as the father of one of Shanley's alleged victims, attended the deposition.

According to Ford, McCormack said Cote admitted this spring to having the sexual relationship with the teenager. Ford said McCormack wavered on the age of the teenager, sometimes saying he was 17 and other times saying he was 18 or 19.

But sources familiar with the case told **AP Associated Press** the boy was 15 or 16 at the time of the alleged incidents. The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that had the boy been older than 16, the legal age of consent, there would have been no grounds for the criminal investigation conducted this spring by the Sullivan County Attorney's office.

Since the priest abuse scandal rocked the church early this year, McCormack repeatedly has said that no priest accused of sexual misconduct with a minor is serving in active ministry in New Hampshire.

The teenager who claims Cote assaulted him came forward in April. The man, now 35, said Cote molested him during the early 1980s while Cote was assigned to St. Patrick's Church in Newport.

This spring, Cote was moved from St. Aloysius of Gonzaga in Nashua to St. Patrick in Jaffrey.

The file on the investigation has not been made public. Assistant Attorney General William Delker has said the case has become part of a state investigation of how the diocese dealt with sexual abuse allegations against priests.

Asked what the parishioners in Jaffrey had been told about the allegations, McCormack said Cote was free to answer questions about the allegations if asked, but was not told to address the issue specifically, Ford said.

Ford said lawyer Roderick MacLeish asked McCormack whether he now would tell parishioners about the nature of the allegations against Cote, to which McCormack responded that he would consider it.

"In my opinion, that's not good enough," Ford said in an interview.

"They need to know immediately that this person engaged in sex with a teenager."

Ford also said that MacLeish, at his request, contacted state child welfare

workers Friday to report Ford's concerns that Cote was a risk to children.

McCormack, 67, was secretary of ministerial personnel for the Archdiocese of Boston from 1984 to 1994 and handled sexual abuse complaints against priests for Cardinal Bernard Law from 1992 to 1995. He became bishop of Manchester in 1998.

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