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Former priest removed over sexual, emotional abuse complaint is a licensed counselor in rural north Florida

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QUINCY — David McCreanor, a former Catholic priest who was removed from his duties over "credible accusations" he sexually and emotionally abused teenage girls more than three decades ago, lives a quiet life in rural north Florida without supervision or consequence.

The white clapboard house in Quincy that he rented until recently from renowned outdoor writer Guy de la Valdene is tucked away in an isolated area full of tree farms and houses on long expanses of land two and a half miles north of town.

His closest neighbor, Juan Jesus Chalchi Ruiz, who lives a half-mile up the road on the other side of Bainbridge Highway, never met McCreanor. He knew nothing of McCreanor's past, or that three sisters, the daughters of a former public defender, accused the priest of abusing them when they were teens in the 1980s.

"After the diocese concluded accusations against David McCreanor were credible, McCreanor was publicly removed as pastor of St. Louis Catholic Church in Tallahassee on October 31, 1997," the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee said in a statement released to the Democrat. "As of that date through today, he has not been allowed to minister as a priest or represent himself as a priest."

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The diocese also submitted a formal petition to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, requesting that McCreanor be removed from the priesthood. The Diocese is still

awaiting a final decision from Rome.

McCreanor agreed to enter a church-run treatment program but left without permission and returned to Tallahassee three months after he was removed from the church. He admitted no wrongdoing.

While the church found those accusations of sexual and emotional abuse credible enough to remove McCreanor as a priest, local law enforcement did not investigate the allegations and he was never charged with a crime.

Because there was no legal basis to forfeit the pension contributions made prior to his removal, McCreanor has received a small monthly retirement check from the church since he turned 65, the Diocese said.

Contacted at the house he rented and given an opportunity to comment on the allegations made more than three decades ago, McCreanor refused to talk to a reporter who knocked on his door.

“I have no comment. I don’t want to talk to you,” McCreanor said, the door opened a crack to reveal a tall, thin man with gray hair and spectacles. “You need to talk to my lawyer.”

Since he returned to the area 22 years ago, Guy and Teresa de la Valdene have provided McCreanor with lodging. He lived in the guest house of their estate in Havana for 20 years before moving to another house they owned in Quincy.

“He was a priest at the church my wife went to when he got booted out. My wife was upset and the church was upset,” said Guy de la Valdene, an outdoor writer who hung out with Jimmy Buffett, Thomas McGuane and Jim Harrison in Key West during the 1970s. “Had it been a boy I would have been upset, but it was a girl. That’s normal.”

De la Valdene said he understood that the women involved in the scandal were 19 and 20 years old and older. When a reporter told him that two of the victims were under 18 at the time, De la Valdene amended his comment.

“That’s not cool on his part,” De la Valdene said. “But if they were of age and wanted to sleep with a young priest, why not?”

After McCreanor was forced to step down from St. Louis Catholic Church in October 1997 over the allegations made by the teenagers, five adult women came forward and told authorities he had seduced them.

De la Valdene said he didn't talk to McCreanor that much and didn't know much about his personal life. "I don't have much to say about Father David," he said. "The first time I talked to him in a year was the other day. He had bought a bed for where he lives now and wanted to know if he could take it with him when he moves."

De la Valdene sold the property to El Consuelo LLC of Tallahassee on Nov. 4.

Asked in September where he was planning to move, McCreanor said, "You're way ahead of me."

McCreanor, now 71, was 48 in 1996 when three sisters reported McCreanor to the Diocese. After waiting more than a year, and after telling their story in the Tallahassee Democrat, they got the result they wanted – to have McCreanor removed as a priest.

He has been a licensed marriage and family therapist since 1991 and is in good standing with no discipline or public complaints on file, according to Department of Health records.

The alleged abuse occurred during one-on-one counseling sessions with McCreanor in his office at church.

The most serious allegation came from an 18-year-old, who went to McCreanor in 1981, distraught over losing her virginity during senior year, only to have the priest lead her into his bedroom and have sex with her.

Two years later, a 17-year-old, went to McCreanor because her parents didn't approve of her boyfriend. She said McCreanor told her during one counseling session that he had been totally consumed with thoughts of making love to her and couldn't look at her without wanting to have sex with her.

In 1985, when she was 15, another sister went to him at her mother's insistence. She told him she had lost her virginity and he urged her to describe the experience in graphic detail, she later reported.

Her father, a federal public defender who died three months after the Democrat published its first article about the allegations, was stunned when they told him and their mother what McCreanor had done to them. He wanted to do something about it, but the state attorney told him the statute of limitations had passed for criminal charges.

Willie Meggs, Leon County's state attorney at the time, said he couldn't recall anything about the case, other than some women from St. Louis complaining about a priest sleeping with female parishioners.

“I don’t think it ever rose to the level of a police investigation,” said Stephen Slepín, the Tallahassee lawyer who represented McCreanor when the church investigated the allegations against him.

“It was a very unfortunate matter. I remember the church being very upset,” Slepín told the Democrat in a recent interview. “A lot of people were upset when he was removed from his pastorate.”

He remembered arguing with Bishop John Ricard about whether he had sufficient evidence to take away his pastorate and have him removed as a priest.

“I maintained that he hadn’t pursued the appropriate investigation,” Slepín said.

Slepín said he knew of no person who thought ill of McCreanor, “except the recalled memories of those young ladies.”

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