



ABUSE IN THE CHURCH // Accuser removes cloak of silence

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By **MICHAEL FISHER** THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

To Jacob Olivas, a 7-year-old whose devout Catholic parents raised him to revere priests as God, Father Tony felt safe.

Friendly and fatherly, the Rev. Edward Anthony **Rodrigue** wore a perpetual, pleasant grin while he wrestled and joked with children in the playground at St. George Catholic Church and School in Ontario in 1978.

"I trusted him, and I can still feel that trust I had in him. I was just another piece of meat to him," Olivas, now 34, said as he sat in his family's modest Ontario home, just a few feet from the spot where he claims **Rodrigue** first molested him on a living room couch. "I didn't even know what the word 'sex' was ... I didn't know it was wrong. I didn't know what it was."

Olivas is one of five men suing the San Diego and San Bernardino dioceses, alleging that **Rodrigue** molested them at St. George in the late 1970s. At least 10 other men have filed suit over allegations of abuse by **Rodrigue** elsewhere.

Rodrigue, 67, sent a letter to The Press-Enterprise saying he was declining to comment. Removed from the priesthood at his own request in 1992, **Rodrigue** is serving 10 years in state prison after pleading no contest in 1998 to molesting a Highland boy. He had also pleaded no contest to charges in 1979.

Olivas said he has lifelong psychological scars. He struggles with alcoholism, panic attacks and other emotional issues.

He said he remains in therapy and takes medication to cope with anxiety, post-traumatic stress syndrome and depression.

"I feel like he planted this bomb inside of me that's ticking," he said. "This is something I'll be dealing with for the rest of my life."

INTERNALIZED PAIN

Molestation victims frequently cloak their abuse in silence, internalizing the pain as they grapple with denial and guilt, said David Clohessy, executive director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, a victims advocacy and self-help group.

Childhood clergy-abuse victims often struggle with alcohol or drug abuse, failed relationships and have trouble holding a job until they confront their demons in therapy, he explained by telephone.

"One day you realize, 'There is a reason I have this anger. There is reason I am so depressed. There is a reason I drink so much.' That's when you understand the connection," he said.

Olivas said that within a few days of meeting **Rodrigue**, the priest fondled and orally copulated him at Olivas' home. He said he was abused for months, at the family home and the church rectory.

"It was almost like a job, Monday through Friday. ... The only time it didn't happen to me was on the weekends," said Olivas, who still lives in the family home, less than two miles from St. George, the church where he was baptized and confirmed.

LACK OF WARNINGS

Olivas' attorney, Timothy Hale, argues that complaints against **Rodrigue** of sexual misconduct date back to the 1960s and early 1970s, when the Diocese of San Diego oversaw the Inland parishes. In 1976, **Rodrigue** was sent to a Massachusetts treatment center for priests with psychological disorders, then re-assigned to St. George in mid-1977.

Ontario parishioners were not warned of **Rodrigue**'s past, and the priest was not restricted from interacting with children, Hale contends.

Rodrigue lived in a rectory connected to the school by a gate.

Olivas claims that **Rodrigue** would take him through that gate into his bedroom, where he would give him cigarettes, show him horror movies on a VCR and molest him.

Other priests saw Olivas and **Rodrigue** in the rectory but none intervened, said Olivas, the youngest of three brothers.

AFRAID TO KNOW

Olivas said that the last time he was in **Rodrigue's** bedroom, smoking and watching television with two other boys, his oldest brother burst in and dragged him from the room.

"I looked at Father Tony because I was scared and he was just looking straight forward and he had this kind of grin on his face He knew he had been busted," Olivas said.

Outside, Olivas' mother waited in the car.

"She was crying and she kept asking 'Are you OK?' I was crying, my brother was crying," Olivas said.

Olivas said he never saw **Rodrigue** again. His family never spoke about Father Tony.

"I think they were afraid to know what really happened," Olivas said.

Olivas said that as he matured, confusing memories clouded his days. Unable to understand or excuse himself for what happened, Olivas sought refuge in alcohol in his early 20s. Sometimes, he started drinking at 8 a.m. to soothe anxiety attacks.

"If there is such a thing as a hell on Earth, I was in it. I went from being functional to not knowing what was going on in my life," Olivas said. "I constantly hid the truth. I was embarrassed by it."

A VOICE

Olivas said he eventually sought therapy and realized he had been victimized. But Olivas said he does not hate **Rodrigue**.

"He was obviously sick He has an illness. I'm not as angry at him as I am at the people who allowed him to serve," he said. "I still pray every day to God, and a strong part of my faith is forgiveness."

Olivas said he decided to sue to force church leaders to recognize the pain he and others suffered.

"I struggle with 'Am I doing the right thing? Am I going to go to Hell?' I'm not mad at the church. I love my faith. I'm hurt by the officials who are damaging it," said Olivas, who still attends St. George.

He hopes that by suing, he can secure justice for himself and those who keep their abuse secret.

"I'm not a voice for them, but a voice to them, to let them know they aren't alone. There's a sense of relief in knowing I'm not alone. You can only talk to God so much."

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