

RELIGION

OC diocese may have known of fondling charge in 1985

By Susan Kelleher
The Orange County Register

Officials at the Catholic Diocese of Orange were told more than seven years ago of allegations that the Rev. Richard T. Coughlin, founder of a popular boys choir, had molested a Massachusetts boy, church officials in Boston said.

John B. Walsh of the Archdiocese of Boston said officials there contacted Orange County church officials in 1985 after a man told a Boston priest that Coughlin had begun fondling him in 1958, when he was 9.

A spokesman for the Diocese of Orange, however, said there is no record of the allegation, which may have come in the form of a telephone call to the bishop in charge.

"I have seen Father Coughlin's file, and there is simply no record of any allegation or any report of allegations made," said Monsignor Lawrence J. Baird of the Orange diocese. "Boston says they contacted the diocese, and we have no reason to not believe that statement. There is simply no record."

Coughlin could not be reached for comment Saturday.

The priest, who directed the All-American Boys Chorus for 22 years, was stripped of his authority to perform priestly duties in February. The decision followed a church investigation into accusations that he molested five boys, four of them former members of his choir.

Among them was David L. Coleman, whose report to church officials in Boston prompted the 1985 warning.

Coleman, now 45, said he reported Coughlin to Boston church officials in November 1985. He said he told the Rev. John B. McCormack his story of being fondled by Coughlin over a four-year period.

"He told me he would investigate what I told them, but they would never tell me what they found out or what they did about it," Coleman said. "I thought it was unfair, but I didn't have any other choice."

Coleman said he eventually called the Orange diocese himself last year, after he tried reporting Coughlin to the Orange County District Attorney's Office and learned that the church was already investigating a similar complaint.

The Boston archdiocese was

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