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Teen charges lead to church worker's arrest Sexual content alleged: Volunteer at St. Ann's in Cobb became youth director in Florida parish.

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A man accused of molesting three children at a Catholic church in Cobb County two years ago was working with children at a church in Florida until his arrest this week.

Kenneth Joseph **Cassity** had been serving as youth director for the Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Lake Wales, Fla., since Nov. 1, 2001, authorities in Florida said.

He was arrested in Florida on Thursday, charged with two felony counts of child molestation and four misdemeanor counts of sexual battery. Immediately after being arrested, **Cassity**, 43, complained of chest pains and was taken to a local hospital. He was in the hospital emergency room Friday afternoon under police guard.

The sexual molestations are alleged to have occurred between July 1999 and December 2000 while **Cassity** worked at the Catholic Church of St. Ann in east Cobb. One victim came forward to police for the first time this week and led them to the other two.

But what happened between the alleged molestations and Thursday's arrest is unclear. No one at St. Ann's would comment on whether they knew about the allegations, or if they did, how they responded.

St. Ann's did ask **Cassity** to leave the church in 2000, police said. In Friday's edition of the Marietta Daily Journal, the Rev. Raymond Cadran, a vicar at St. Ann's, said **Cassity** was asked to leave because he did not "fit in."

On Friday, the Rev. Bob Susann, pastor of the church, said, "It's an ongoing investigation, and we are cooperating fully with authorities." He declined to comment further.

The Atlanta archdiocese released a statement Friday, saying only that "the archdiocese is cooperating with the authorities at this point in time. Since the investigation is ongoing, we feel that it is inappropriate to comment."

St. Ann's was founded in 1978 and has more than 4,000 members, according to its Web site. **Cassity's** functions at the east Cobb church "concerned the health and wellness of those in the church and the sick and distressed who were not able to attend church," said Cobb County police spokesman Dana Pierce. The Cobb County arrest warrant described **Cassity** as youth minister. Some members at St. Ann's say he was a volunteer. The church declined to answer questions about **Cassity**.

Pierce said he could not comment on whether St. Ann's officials knew about the allegations against **Cassity** prior to this week's arrests.

The warrant alleges that on at least four occasions, **Cassity** fondled the genital area of a 16-year-old boy. He also allegedly fondled two 14-year-old boys over their clothes. It is unclear what, if anything, the Florida church knew about the Cobb County allegations. Officials at Holy Spirit in Lake Wales did not return telephone calls Friday.

Carol Brinati,, a spokeswoman for the Diocese of Orlando, said that Friday was to have been **Cassity's** last day at the parish. He was leaving for personal reasons, Brinati said. Cobb police think that **Cassity** was headed to Chicago.

"While he was at Holy Spirit, we did not have any allegations of child sexual abuse," Brinati said. "We are cooperating with law enforcement."

Cassity was youth director at Holy Spirit, "taking care of the youth in our ministry, delivering the message of Jesus," Brinati said. The ministry is for youth aged 13 to 21.

Cassity also worked for five years until 1999 as a youth minister at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Silver Spring, Md., church officials said. Then he worked briefly in a youth ministry at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Glyndon, Md., after leaving St. Ann's.

Ray Kempisty, a spokesman for the archdiocese of Baltimore, said the church has no knowledge of any sexual misconduct while **Cassity** was there.

Susan Gibbs, a spokeswoman for the Archdiocese of Washington, said St. John the Baptist Catholic Church conducted a criminal background check when **Cassity** was hired.

The Rev. Francis Kazista, pastor of the church, was unavailable. But Kazista said through Gibbs that he "did not have any report of anything inappropriate while [**Cassity**] was at St. John the Baptist."

Most St. Ann's church members who spoke on Friday said they knew **Cassity** only in passing, but they were surprised at the charges.

"I can't believe that he did it; he seemed like such a nice person," said Kathy Simone, a member for 17 years.

Richard Jakuc, supervisor of the ushers, knew **Cassity** "just vaguely," but said he seemed sociable.

Dave Pailthorpe,, a volunteer who directs the lectors at St. Ann's, said **Cassity** was considering going into the seminary. He performed a variety of church functions as a volunteer, including acting as a driver for Cadran, who is legally blind, Pailthorpe said.

Pailthorpe, a parishioner since 1979, is worried about several things, including how the church leadership may have responded to any complaints.

"Your first thing is, you hope it is not true. My second thing is, how was it handled when he left?" His greatest concern relates to the circumstances of **Cassity's** departure. "That they knew and didn't do anything -- that would be the worst thing."

Cobb County police Detective Mary Finleyson and Detective Sgt. C.L. Dillard of the Crimes Against Children Unit arrived in Florida on Friday afternoon to question **Cassity**.

If **Cassity** does not fight extradition, he could be in Cobb County within five days, said Pierce, the Cobb police spokesman. If he resists, it could be up to three months before he is brought to Cobb County, Pierce said.

Pailthorpe said he expects church leaders at St. Ann's to be forthcoming with parishioners about the allegations.

Church members said the allegations did not shake their religious beliefs.

"My faith is not in individuals," said Ellen Hoover. "My faith is in Jesus and the teachings of the Catholic

faith."

Staff writers John Blake, Mary MacDonald and Clint Williams contributed to this article.

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