

Priest's Transfer Indicates Strife on Homosexuality

By GEORGE VECSEY
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BOSTON — The recent transfer of the Rev. Paul R. Shanley, who has gained a national reputation for his work with homosexuals and their families, and the resulting controversy are an indication of the degree of conflict within organized religion over dealing with homosexuality.

Church officials say the Roman Catholic priest's shift to a quiet suburban parish was made in response to financial and personnel shortages in the archdiocese, but he says he was transferred to negate his ministry to homosexuals.

"Paul Shanley helped me understand and love my child when I found out she was a lesbian," said one mother in Boston. "When the archdiocese took him away, it not only removed him from individuals but it also removed him from their families. It hurt hundreds of people."

'A Man of Reconciliation'

"The loss is gigantic," said the Rev. Patrick O'Neill, an official in the young adult ministry for the United States Catholic Conference. "Paul is a man of reconciliation, like Jesus. We need 100 Paul Shanleys."

While Roman Catholicism and most other denominations regard active homosexuality as sinful or wrong, some clergy and theologians have argued recently that homosexuals must be loved and accepted for themselves, even if homosexuality is not condoned.

For the past eight years, Father Shanley has traveled around the country, lecturing to the clergy, educators and counselors and distributing tapes of his talks on how Catholicism should respond to homosexuality.

The 47-year-old native of Boston became well known here as a "street priest" in the turbulent 1960's, working with runaways and those in the drug culture. His efforts were endorsed by Richard Cardinal Cushing.

When Humberto Cardinal Medeiros replaced the late Cardinal Cushing in 1970, "I told the Cardinal that the biggest prob-

Wearing blue jeans and long hair, the slim, intense priest frequented the fast-food shops of Kenmore Square, the bridge in the Public Gardens and a notorious "block" downtown where runaways were often turned into male and female prostitutes.

"I discovered the majority of runaways are gay," Father Shanley says. "I told them they were not sinful and did not need shrinks, but that they had to respect themselves. I told them God loved them, but I did not work only with Roman Catholics. I worked with everybody."

Helped Them See Condition

According to a psychologist who has worked with Father Shanley and who requests anonymity, the priest's belief that homosexual patterns are formed early in childhood are matched by recent assertions by Dr. William H. Masters and Virginia Johnson, the sex researchers.

"Paul helped homosexuals and their families to see the condition from its start," the psychologist added. "From what I understand from a theological viewpoint, something that is decided at the age of 3 or 4 is less of a sin."

Often feeding or finding housing for runaways, Father Shanley never hid the fact that he was a priest. Brian McNaught, a leader of Dignity, an organization of Catholic homosexuals, says: "Paul established credibility by remaining a priest when others dropped out. He urged gay people to be responsible, to form long-term relationships."

In recent years, Father Shanley says, Cardinal Medeiros forbade him to "say mass for homosexuals, start a parish for gays, encourage gay unions or give my opinion on the morality of certain acts." He added, "Fortunately, some of the most respected theologians have taken a liberal position in recent years."

Angered Wichita Bishop

Two years ago he traveled to Wichita, Kan., to campaign against a proposed ordinance that would have limited public jobs for homosexuals. The local Bishop, who supported the ordinance, was reportedly angry that a Boston priest was op-

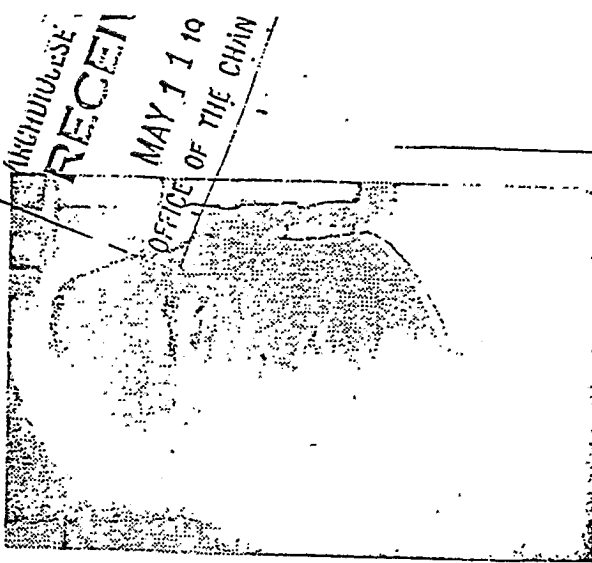
go back to parish work," Father Shanley recalls. "The Cardinal told me he didn't think it was necessary to have a ministry for homosexuals because they should feel welcome in any parish."

"The Cardinal also told me he had received three letters complaining about me. I think there's some pressure on him. The conservatives are the ones who support the church best, and they don't like what I'm doing."

One official in the archdiocese said it was normal for a priest to be transferred after "seven or eight years," but Father Shanley said, "I'm the only priest in the country working full-time with gays. Why cancel my ministry?"

After being shunned by many apprehensive pastors, he has been taken in by "a very sympathetic pastor" in a family-oriented parish, and continues his work in his spare time with the help of an answering service in Newton. However, he says that many of his speaking engagements have been canceled since his transfer.

"We Catholics always need a scapegoat, and our current scapegoat is the sexual minority," he says. "Most homosexuals left the established church long ago, and I would say rightfully so. I tried to keep them in, and look what happened to me."



The New York Times/Doug Bruce
The Rev. Paul R. Shanley photographed last week in new parish.

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