

Priest Abuse Case Settled – Archdiocese to Pay \$875,000 in 70's Allegation

A Gulf War veteran who served as a North Side altar boy in the 1970s will receive \$875,000 from the Archdiocese of Chicago to settle sexual abuse allegations against his former parish priest, the man's attorney said Friday.

Robert Holomshek, now 37 and living in Joliet, was preparing to file a lawsuit against the archdiocese before reaching the settlement, attorney Gene Hollander said.

A spokeswoman for the archdiocese said it does not comment on settlements but did not deny Hollander's claims.

Between the ages of 7 and 10, Holomshek was repeatedly molested by the Rev. Joseph L. Fitzharris at the former St. Francis Xavier school on Chicago's North Side, where Holomshek served as an altar boy, Hollander alleged.

Fitzharris, who did not return a call for comment, resigned in 1995, according to the archdiocese. His name appears on the archdiocese's online list of local priests with substantiated allegations of sexual misconduct with minors.

He was also among a dozen priests named in a sexual abuse lawsuit that the archdiocese settled in May for \$6.85 million.

Hollander said Holomshek buried his memories for decades but they came flooding back in 2005 when he smelled burning incense while attending an Easter church function. At first, Holomshek could barely talk about the memories. But in the past two years, "like a door creaking open," he has been able to reveal more, his attorney said.

Holomshek, who dropped out of college, served as a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter pilot in Operation Desert Storm.

He was once an improvisational actor but has been unable to hold down steady employment Hollander said, adding that Holomshek remains in therapy.

"Every aspect of my client's life has been affected," he said. "He thinks all of his problems really stem from what happened to him as a little boy."