

## Investigation under way on sex allegation against priest

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A retired Sauk Centre area Roman Catholic priest allegedly sexually abused a 31-year-old retarded Waite Park man last summer in an incident that is being investigated by local authorities, the Times has learned.

The priest, the Rev. Raoul Gauthier, long-time chaplain at St. Michael's Hospital in Sauk Centre, has since left the country and has been unavailable to local authorities.

Stearns County Attorney Roger Van Heel Wednesday confirmed that his office is investigating allegations against Gauthier but declined to reveal specific details.

Van Heel said that police reports on the incident were being reviewed and charges were likely, perhaps as early as next week.

Gauthier, 76, allegedly picked up the retarded man on Aug. 18 at a Waite Park business where the man works. Gauthier then drove the man to a parking lot in the city where the priest allegedly unzipped the man's pants and masturbated him with his hand, according to sources close to the investigation.

No other sexual contact between the priest and the man apparently was made, the sources said.

Gauthier apparently first met the man while doing part-time parish work in the Sauk Centre area where the man had lived, sources said.

The retarded man got into Gauthier's car at the Waite Park business because "he trusted him," one source said. The retarded man, whose name has not been disclosed, now lives in a group home for the mentally retarded in the St. Cloud area. The man apparently was not completely aware of the nature of the sexual act allegedly performed by Gauthier, sources said. Through conversations with the owner of the Waite Park business, shortly after the incident, however, the man became aware of what had allegedly happened and has since required some counseling by social workers, sources say.

"He was pretty had off because of it," one source said. The man is said to have a very low IQ but is capable of carrying out menial tasks.

The Waite Park Police Department began investigating the incident Sept. 1 when the retarded man's employer filed a complaint with the department.

A statement was taken from Gauthier in which the priest admitted he had masturbated the man, sources say. However, when police tried contacting Gauthier about two weeks later for further interviews, they discovered he had left the United States for Canada. Gauthier is a former French-Canadian citizen who was born in Quebec.

Gauthier had told associates that he would be in Canada visiting a brother in Saskatchewan who is dying, the sources said.

Gauthier is now living in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, the Times has learned.

Although Gauthier's move out of the country hampered the police investigation, additional information needed by authorities on the incident was obtained by other means, sources say.

The Waite Park Police Depart-

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