

### Holes in the story

## Think list of abusers who were at McQuaid is complete? It's not

### Sean Lahman and Steve Orr

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

When Tom Chiarella read last month about sexual abuse allegations against seven priests once assigned to his alma mater, McQuaid Jesuit High School, he was sick to his stomach. Chiarella had known that sexual abuse had occurred at the Brighton secondary school because he was a victim of it. The trauma hung over his head for years before he could find a way out. His personal escape culminated in the bold step of telling the world what had happened to him in an article for *Esquire* magazine in 2003 called "My Education." Chiarella recounted how lay teacher John J. Tobin had harassed, stalked and sexually abused him between 1975 and his graduation in 1979.

What disturbed Chiarella were allegations that came to light Jan. 15, when a regional Jesuit organization named 50 priests who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors. Seven of those priests once taught at McQuaid. Publication of that list has prompted a new stream of allegations against staff who taught at McQuaid, with the Brighton police and the *Democrat and Chronicle* receiving multiple calls. At the same time, the release has raised questions about the thoroughness and transparency of efforts to acknowledge and resolve past abuses.

Asked about the Jesuits' list, leaders at McQuaid were unable to make clear when and where the misconduct by the seven priests occurred, how many McQuaid students were victimized, and why the school had previously denied knowledge of credible allegations against many of the priests named.

School officials say they didn't see the Jesuit

list before it was released and had no independent knowledge about the priests who were named.

Chiarella said he was dismayed at McQuaid's

THINK LIST OF ABUSERS WHO WERE AT McQUAID IS COMPLETE? IT'S NOT



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John Tobin in  
1980. PHOTO PROVIDED BY  
SEAN LAHMAN/ USA TODAY  
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### John Tobin in 1980. PHOTO PROVIDED BY SEAN LAHMAN/ USA TODAY NETWORK ILLUSTRATION / GETTY Chiarella

reaction.

"I think it's amazing, the institutional indifference to these problems," Chiarella said. "They're perpetuating a system where a 15-year-old boy feels he shouldn't and can't speak out."

pants — because that claim was among the information that the school gave Brighton police 16 years ago.

What's not clear is whether McQuaid knew about this alleged misconduct much earlier. The Jesuit Northeast Province says they first became aware that Riforgiato

## Known abusers missing from list

For decades, Roman Catholic institutions have been accused of shielding abusive clerics and resisting efforts to bring past sins to light.

McQuaid leaders insist this is not another example of that pattern.

In December, McQuaid officials acknowledged there had been credible accusations against two former priests who worked at the school. But they told the *Democrat and Chronicle* they weren't aware of any additional names that would appear on the soon-to-be-released list of Jesuit abusers.

In January, a reporter again asked McQuaid's director of communications, Sean Mullen, whether the school knew of any other credible allegations of sexual abuse against former Jesuit or lay staff members and he again said no.

But when the regional Jesuit organization released its list, it included five more McQuaid priests than the school had acknowledged, and it made no mention of Tobin, a lay teacher, nor a priest who had also bedeviled Chiarella during this time.

School officials responded by saying they knew nothing about abuse in which any of those priests may have engaged while teaching at the school, and said they were unable to determine whether Chiarella's allegations against Tobin were credible because the former teacher was dead.

Other Roman Catholic organizations have had to cope with abuse allegations against priests or teachers who were deceased by the time the allegations surfaced. Many of these organizations, including the Diocese of Rochester, have investigated such claims and judged them credible despite their inability to interview the accused.

Public records obtained recently by the *Democrat and Chronicle* revealed that McQuaid had received at least three independent accusations against Tobin, and the school eventually admitted to a reporter that it had in fact fired Tobin for what Mullen described as "incidences of inappropriate behavior" during a class trip to Europe.

They had also reported the allegations against Tobin, and additional accusations against two other Jesuit teachers, to Brighton police in 2003.

had been abusing minors in 1969, and that the priest-in-training had admitted his abuse.

It is unclear how McQuaid's parent organization could have been aware of these events for 50 years while local school officials were in the dark.

It's also unclear why the school was unaware of credible allegations against Denny, which the Jesuit province said first came to their attention in 2002, or allegations against Voelkle, which were reported to the Jesuits in 1980.

How the regional Jesuit organization could have been aware of these events for 50 years while local school officials were in the dark is not apparent. McQuaid operates independently under the control of its own board of trustees, though it is closely affiliated with the Jesuit order and employs Jesuit priests as administrators and teachers.

## McQuaid's reaction

In a letter sent to members of the McQuaid community on Friday, after this article first appeared online, the school's president, the Rev. Robert Reiser, and its principal, Adam Baber, defended their handling of the Jesuit list.

They asserted they had given the *Democrat and Chronicle* "accurate and complete information" about the abuse allegations and said the suggestion that McQuaid had been less than transparent was "not true."

The letter also summarized the allegations against the seven priests and against Tobin, and encouraged former students and others who felt they had been the victim of sexual abuse to contact McQuaid and Brighton police.

Reiser and Baber cited their "firm resolve to address abuse issues promptly, comprehensively and compassionately."

On multiple occasions, the *Democrat and Chronicle* invited the school's current president, Rev. Robert Reiser, or other school officials to sit down to discuss these allegations and the institution's response to them. None of those invitations were accepted.

But public records offer some insight into how the school responded to the allegations of sexual abuse published in

## McQuaid silent on credible allegations

Fourteen percent of the priests (seven in all) on the list of 50 priests released by the Jesuits spent time at the secondary school on South Clinton Avenue in Brighton.

Ferretting out where the alleged acts had occurred proved difficult, however.

For instance, the list said that the Rev. Robert Voelkle, who spent much of the 1960s at McQuaid, had abused minors in the 1960s and 1970s. But the list didn't make clear where and when the abuse had occurred, and McQuaid officials said they didn't know.

A Jesuit spokesman, Michael Gabriele, later acknowledged that some of Voelkle's misconduct had occurred while he was at McQuaid, but said he had no more information about it.

Based on vague language in the Jesuit list, the Rev. Thomas Denny also may have committed some of his abusive acts when he was on the McQuaid faculty in the late 1970s.

But despite the fact that two separate investigations by the Jesuits had found allegations against him credible, neither the Jesuit Northeast Province nor McQuaid officials could say whether any of Denny's misconduct had occurred while he was at McQuaid.

The Jesuit list did make clear that a priest in training, Leonard Riforgiato, was at McQuaid in the mid-1960s when he engaged in abusive behavior.

School officials initially said they knew nothing about it.

In fact, McQuaid officials at one time had known all about the allegation that Riforgiato had instructed a student to drop his

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**Tom Chiarella's picture from the 1979 McQuaid yearbook.** SEAN LAHMAN

**Tom Chiarella in his Greencastle, Ind., apartment Jan. 29.** DOUG MCSCHOOLER

**John Tobin.** SEAN LAHMAN