

## **Fr. Kenneth LaVan**

The secret personnel file of Kenneth LaVan shows a pernicious “blind spot” among Catholic officials at the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis: the stunning and heartless minimization of the sexual abuse of girls and women.

This disregard for female victims cuts across the entire chancery staff, including Archbishop Flynn, who openly questioned the credibility of multiple female victims and decided they were not covered under the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Even more shocking is that LaVan’s file is littered with allegations of violence dating back to the 1980s. Women and girls came forward and told how LaVan sexually abused them—including the forcible rape of a teen, sexualized kissing of children, and threats of arson and murder.

Despite all of this--as well as two stints in treatment and two lawsuits--LaVan was not included in any Archdiocese list of accused priests until January 2014, more than 25 years after the Archdiocese knew he was a violent threat.

LaVan’s predatory behavior first came to light in the 1980s when one of his victims--who was a teenage girl at the time of the abuse--came forward with a lawsuit.

After the suit settled in 1985, LaVan faced another allegation of sexual contact with a parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi in Lake St. Croix Beach. In an interview, the woman told Bishop Carlson that LaVan boasted about his sexual exploits with numerous women.

According to the documents, when the woman told her husband about her sexual relationship with LaVan and tried to stop contact, LaVan drove by her house at all hours. He also threatened that he could be capable of burning down their house and killing her husband if she insisted on ending the relationship.

As a result, LaVan was immediately sent to Jemez Springs for evaluation. Robert Carlson, understanding that the LaVan situation could explode, recommended that Archbishop Roach create a good cover story to explain the reason that LaVan was resigning from St. Francis.

LaVan did not cooperate fully in Jemez Springs and returned to Minnesota. Although doctors at Jemez Springs and St. Paul believed that LaVan needed intensive therapy, Archbishop Roach appointed LaVan pastor of St. Richard Church in Richfield.

Two years later, more victims started coming forward. O’Connell met with two young victims, one of whom charged that LaVan forcibly raped her at St. Raphael’s. Another, who was a child at St. Michael’s in the early 1960s, said that LaVan used to sit the child on his lap and ask to be kissed in a sexualized manner.

LaVan admitted to kissing both victims, but denied the rape allegations. He was then sent to St. Luke’s for another evaluation.

In 1989, a parent of one of LaVan's victims wrote an angry letter to Carlson in response to his statement that he was unaware of her daughter's allegations. She wrote that her daughter "followed policy" and reported the abuse to the Archdiocese. She also blasted Carlson for questioning whether or not he would pay for the girl's counseling, because she had refused to see a church psychologist.

Four days after LaVan's release from in-patient care at St. Luke's in 1989, Archbishop Roach assigned LaVan to St. Joseph's Parish in Lino Lakes. LaVan was told he must attend Sex Addicts Anonymous meetings and was put under "supervision and social support." LaVan's assigned supervisors were known perpetrators Wadja and Skluzacek.

In 1992, another LaVan victim came forward and met with McDonough. McDonough also received reports that LaVan was engaging in "boundary violations" with parish staff at St. Joseph and that LaVan was "aggressive" with victims.

Despite all of this information, the Clergy Review Board determined in 1995 that LaVan could remain in a parish, as long as he was under supervision. By 2002, at least two more female victims had come forward--a child and an adult. The adult was a patient under psychiatric care at the time of the abuse.

But when it came time to implement the Charter and remove clerics with credible allegations, Archbishop Flynn kept LaVan in a parish, saying that there were doubts about the credibility of the multiple allegations against him. By this time, at least four victims had come forward to say that LaVan had abused them when they were children.

LaVan's faculties were finally suspended in December 2013, as a result of media attention around sex abuse and cover-up lawsuits filed under Minnesota's civil window.