News



by Heidi Schlumpf

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A prominent and popular Chicago priest, who for more than three decades headed a five-campus child services organization, has been removed from ministry while the Chicago Archdiocese reviews allegations of sexual abuse of minors against him.

Allegations against Fr. John P. Smyth have been reported to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Cook County State's Attorney, according to a Jan. 18 statement from the archdiocese.

Smyth, who is now retired, was superintendent of Maryville Academy from 1970 to 2003, after serving as assistant superintendent for eight years before that. The allegations date to his time at Maryville's suburban Des Plaines campus, in 2002-2003, the archdiocese's statement said.

Maryville was originally founded as an orphanage in 1883 and still includes some residential programs. It also provides emergency shelter, substance abuse treatment and mental health services.

Known for his fundraising prowess, Smyth often mentioned his years as an All-American basketball player at the University of Notre Dame, in his pitches. He raised

millions over his tenure at Maryville, according to a profile from Notre Dame's athletic department.

But the suicide of a 14-year-old girl and reports of physical and sexual assaults perpetrated by residents on other residents prompted the State of Illinois to call Maryville unsafe and remove the children under its care in the early 2000s, according to the archdiocesan newspaper, The New World. Smyth was ousted, and Maryville eventually reopened under new leadership.

After leaving Maryville, Smyth started the Standing Tall Charitable Foundation, which helps fund scholarships and other programs for disadvantaged youth. He then served as president of a suburban all-boys Catholic high school, Notre Dame College Prep in Niles, from 2007 to 2014.

The "persons" making the sexual abuse allegations have been offered the services of the archdiocese's Office of Assistance Ministry, the archdiocesan statement said.

Smyth has been asked to leave the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe—on the grounds of Maryville's Des Plaines campus—while the allegations are investigated. His faculties to minister in the Archdiocese of Chicago have been withdrawn, the statement said.

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