

Priest in Mass. clergy abuse crisis seeks new trial

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BOSTON — A notorious priest at the center of the clergy sex abuse crisis in the Boston archdiocese is challenging the repressed memories of his victim in a bid for a new trial.

Defrocked priest Paul Shanley is serving a 12- to 15-year prison sentence after being convicted in 2005 of repeatedly raping and fondling a boy at a Newton parish in the 1980s.

In a motion for a new trial, Shanley claims his former lawyer did not properly challenge the repressed memory evidence that helped convict him. The victim testified he repressed memories of the sexual abuse until 2002, when they came rushing back as the sex abuse scandal unfolded in the media.

Judge Stephen Neel, who presided at Shanley's trial, is scheduled to hear arguments on Shanley's motion in Suffolk Superior Court today.

Middlesex District Attorney Gerry Leone said the verdict was just and that Shanley has not raised sufficient reason for a new trial.

"The concept of recovered memory by victims of abuse has been accepted by both the scientific and legal communities, as well as the jury who convicted Mr. Shanley after hearing the full evidence in this case," Leone said. "We remain confident in the jury's verdict."

Shanley was known in the 1960s and 1970s as a "street priest" who reached out to troubled children and homosexuals. He became a central figure in the abuse scandal after internal church records released in 2002 showed that officials were aware of sexual abuse complaints against him as early as 1967, but they continued to transfer him from parish to parish.

Four men claimed they were molested by Shanley at St. Jean's Parish in Newton during the 1980s. All but one of the men were dropped from the criminal case before Shanley's 2005 trial.

Shanley was convicted after the alleged victim, then 27, testified that Shanley repeatedly took him out of Sunday morning catechism classes and molested him in the church bathroom, the rectory, the confessional

and the pews. The abuse started when he was 6, he said.

In his motion for a new trial, Shanley's new attorney, Robert F. Shaw Jr., says the man's memories of the abuse are unreliable. The man testified that he began remembering abuse by the then-priest in 2002, after learning that his childhood friend had recovered memories of abuse by Shanley.

Shaw argues that Shanley's trial attorney should have presented evidence that the theory of repressed memory is challenged within the scientific community.

"There is no solid empirical support for repressed memory," Shaw said Wednesday.

The men who said Shanley abused them at St. Jean's were among at least two dozen men who claimed they had been molested by Shanley. Many of those men reached civil settlements with the Boston archdiocese, including the man whose complaint led to Shanley's criminal conviction.