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4 MONKS DENY THEY WERE ABUSED

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The day after the accused killer of a nun claimed he was molested by leaders at Holy Cross Academy, four other Ukrainian student monks denied to police they had been sexually abused, sources close to the case said.

Despite those denials two weeks ago, police are still investigating claims of fondling at the Byzantine Catholic school.

Detectives from the Miami-Dade Police's Sex Crimes Unit went to the West Kendall campus on Monday to question the Rev. Abbot Gregory Wendt and the Rev. Damien Gibault, sources said. Neither was there. Gibault's lawyer said the men were not expecting detectives and happened to be elsewhere at the time. The two priests have adamantly denied any wrongdoing. "We will be talking with the state attorney's office to discuss providing information to prove these allegations are false," said attorney Richard Hersch. Another student monk, Mykhaylo Kofel, confessed to stabbing Sister Michelle Lewis to death two weeks ago. He is charged with first-degree murder and is being held without bail at the Miami-Dade County Jail.

On Monday, Assistant State Attorney Gail Levine released portions of Kofel's confession. With critical portions blacked out for legal reasons, the statement said that Wendt rushed to the homicide office with a lawyer while detectives were still questioning Kofel at around 3 a.m. on March 26. In the statement taken by Detective Arthur Nanni, Kofel said he did not want an attorney. He also said he speaks English most of the time - except for "big words." The confession also included some biographical details: the name of the small village, Verhovina-Bistra, where Kofel is from in Western Ukraine; that he lived with the other student monks in a house they shared with Gibault. Homicide detectives first began questioning the 18-year-old Kofel after they knocked on his door just hours after Lewis' body was found and noticed cuts and scratches on his hands and face, sources close to the case said. They brought Kofel to the police station. After confessing to the murder, Kofel said Wendt and Gibault had sexually abused him over a period of years, sources said. The two priests are the highest-ranking officials at the school.

"The allegations are baseless and unequivocally untrue," said Hersch. "After a complete investigation, they're going to be found to be baseless." Both the homicide investigation - and the sexual abuse probe that spiderwebbed from it - began after Lewis failed to show up for Sunday Mass on March 25. Her body was found inside the three-bedroom house where she lived on school grounds. She had been stabbed repeatedly. Kofel told detectives he got drunk on Greek wine and killed her because she had been verbally abusive. An elderly nun who also lived in the house, Sister Marie Lurz, told police during at least two sessions of questioning that she heard nothing. "She was asleep in her room on Saturday night," said Jeffrey Fink, an attorney the school has hired for Lurz. "She knew nothing about the homicide until she was told about it." The school's chief maintenance officer told police he spotted one of the five Ukrainian student monks in the house a few months before the murder, sources told the Herald. Neither nun was home and the house was supposed to be locked.

Maintenance man Daniel Puerto told homicide detectives he thought the intruder looked like a different trainee and not Kofel, sources said. **Puerto's lawyer, Terence Lenamon, would not comment.** In another development, the school has hired a lawyer for one of the four Ukrainians who told police they had not been abused. Petro Torenta, 20, is the oldest of the Ukrainian group who came to study at Holy Cross. The school's insurance company is now providing lawyers for Torenta, Gibault, Wendt, a second nun and a janitor "to help guide them through this ordeal," according to board member and attorney Joseph Blonsky.