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Ex-Altar Boy Alleges Sexual Abuse

By Carol DeMare
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ALBANY - The Albany Roman Catholic Diocese said Wednesday it would investigate allegations that the pastor of Holy Cross Church molested an altar boy 32 years ago.

Attorney John Aretakis filed a lawsuit this week against Bishop Howard Hubbard, the diocese, Holy Cross parish, and the priest, the Rev. Daniel J. Maher, on behalf of the alleged victim, Thomas G. Clements III, now 44, of Colonie.

Clements claimed he was sexually assaulted twice by Maher in 1973, when he was 12, at a camp on Saratoga Lake. Maher denied the allegations, and the diocese said the priest poses no threat to the parish.

Clements' lawsuit, filed in Saratoga County Supreme Court, is seeking \$2 million in damages and accuses the diocese of negligence for allowing Maher to remain in active ministry at a parish where there is an elementary school.

"I don't think he should be around little boys," Clements said at a sidewalk news conference outside the church at Western Avenue and Rosemont Street.

Clements said he contacted the diocese twice last year but got no satisfaction.

The diocese responded in a written statement. "Until this individual approached the Independent Mediation Assistance Program (IMAP) in October of 2004, we had never heard of the allegation that we're hearing about to day," it said in part.

Since that time, neither Clements nor his attorney have provided specifics, the diocese said.

"Despite that fact, when we learned of his initial contact we immediately questioned the priest, and he has strenuously denied the allegation," the diocese said. "We currently believe that the Holy Cross community faces no threat from his presence and he continues to serve the parish as its pastor."

The diocese urged Aretakis and his client to help the investigation.

In the last 54 years in the Albany diocese, 145 individuals who claimed they were sexually abused as minors have raised allegations against 76 priests. Twenty priests have been removed, and nine are under investigation, diocesan officials said earlier this year.

Clements said he was an altar boy at St. Francis De Sales Church on Exchange Street in the West Albany area of Colonie. Maher was an associate pastor, Aretakis said.

In recent years when priest sexual abuse reports were "on the news every day, I went crazy," Clements said. "I had to get counseling." He said he was suicidal and in 2002 left his state job as a computer operator for the Office for Technology after 24 years.

Mark Lyman, co-director of the Albany Chapter of Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, called on the bishop "to put Father Maher on administrative leave immediately."

Aretakis said that over the last couple of weeks he has leafletted in the neighborhood to alert parents of children in the school.

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