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\$3M Suit Claims Abuse by Clergy

Charlton Man Files Lawsuit Alleging 2 Priests Made Sexual Advances toward Him As a Teen

By Michele Morgan Bolton
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A man who claims he was sexually abused by two Albany priests both here and in the Boston area is suing the Albany and Boston dioceses for \$3 million.

Named in the lawsuit filed in Boston's Suffolk County Superior Court are former Rev. Mark Haight, who has already been removed from ministry, and the late Rev. Donald Starks of St. Francis de Sales Church in West Albany. Bishop Howard Hubbard and former Boston Cardinal Bernard Law are also defendants.

Michael Mooney, now 42, was 14 and an altar boy in Starks' church in 1976 when he said the abuse began. He also claims that more abuse occurred in a hotel room in Framingham, Mass.; other Boston-area locations where Starks and Haight allegedly took him on trips to buy church supplies; and in Haight's airplane.

"I looked up to priests as if they were the closest things to God," said Mooney, of Charlton, and a married father of three children. "That's how I was brought up. When I was 14 years old I was very active in our church. Then I met two priests who changed my life forever."

Ken Goldfarb, diocesan spokesman, acknowledged receiving the lawsuit, saying the Diocese had become aware of Mooney in March but hadn't yet met with him.

"We'll respond appropriately in court as we have in the past," Goldfarb said.

Mooney said he was originally sent to Starks for tutoring and counseling and the priest kicked him in the shins when he answered incorrectly.

"He'd say, 'That's on your charge account,' " Mooney said, admitting he never understood what the priest meant.

Starks would snap the waistband of Mooney's underwear during back rubs and on at least one occasion spanked him after a face-to-face confession in the priest's rectory bedroom, court papers allege. The abuse then peaked in a memorable incident with each priest, Mooney said.

With Starks, it was during one of many Boston trips.

"He said, 'We're going to take care of your charge account,' " Mooney explained. "I thought he was going to buy me a present, to be quite honest."

What happened was anything but, he said: "I was 15 and he wined and dined me. And then he attacked me at the hotel that night."

After Mooney fought the priest off, he said Starks finally retired to the room's other queen-sized bed and masturbated under the covers for hours.

Haight, on the other hand, offered to take Mooney for a ride in his airplane during the same time

frame, court papers said.

"I thought, 'Wow. He's asking me. Who am I?' " Mooney said.

But then the priest wrestled with him in the car and refused to remove his hand from the boy's genitals, and again touched him in the plane, once in the air, Mooney said.

When he objected, Mooney said Haight repeatedly cut the engine and pretended the plane was falling.

Aretakis negotiated an almost \$1 million settlement for another of Haight's alleged victims in 1996. He said church officials settled another case in 1989 but then allowed Haight to work for another eight years before defrocking him.

"The Albany Diocese is responsible for the acts of its priests," said Mooney's lawyer, John Aretakis. "Mark Haight was a serial child molester. He's pathological and has victimized children as young as 11."

Mooney and Aretakis accused Hubbard of knowingly protecting pedophile priests.

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