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Priests Take Leave As Suit Aired

By James V. Franco
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ALBANY - Three local priests named in a civil lawsuit by an alleged victim of clergy abuse have taken a voluntary leave of absence until two independent investigations are completed, said Roman Catholic Diocese Bishop Howard Hubbard.

Two priests are still in active ministry - Rev. Donald Ophals, of St. Frances DeSales, in Troy, and Rev. Alan Jupin, of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Schenectady. The third, Rev. Louis Douglas, is retired and living in Delaware but was occasionally performing the duties of a priest. Shortly after a civil suit was filed against the three, the Wilmington Roman Catholic Diocese suspended Douglas' rights to practice.

A fourth priest, Rev. Neil Cawlings, named in the civil suit filed on behalf of a 42-year-old Schenectady resident, is from England.

Diocese Spokesman Ken Goldfarb said that temporary replacements will be found for weekend services at the two parishes and that the diocese is working to find a more permanent solution.

"Fathers Jupin, Ophals and Douglas have strenuously denied the allegations but each believes the well-being of the church is best served by his taking a temporary leave from ministry," said Hubbard in a prepared statement.

The civil suit charges that Jupin stalked and harassed "John Doe No. 4" in February. The victim claims Jupin tried to convince him not to go public with the story that Jupin got him drunk and raped him when he was 16 years old.

The other three priests are named in the suit because Jupin allegedly was acting on their behalf and on behalf of the Albany Diocese and Hubbard.

Schenectady County District Attorney Robert Carney, at the diocese's request, is investigating the stalking charges, which is a misdemeanor-level crime. The statute of limitations on the alleged abuse charges has long expired.

Attorney John Aretakis, who represents many alleged clergy sexual abuse victims, said that he and his client are still discussing the possibility of pursuing criminal charges against Jupin for the stalking.

His civil suit is asking for \$600,000 plus punitive damages.

"Yesterday the diocese called my client a liar, and today these three priests are removed," he said. "My client and I are satisfied that the Capital District is a safer place today as a result of his courage."

The diocese investigated a complaint of sexual abuse twice regarding Douglas, once decades ago and once in 2000, shortly after the clergy abuse scandal rocked the nation.

Goldfarb said there was no proof to substantiate the allegations, but that the diocese did pay the claimant a settlement. He would not give details of the investigation or the amount of the settlement.

Also, Goldfarb said last week that there is an open investigation into one of the three priests, but

would not say which one, or if it involved the most recent case.

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