

BishopAccountability.org

More Abuse Claims / 24 Priests Named in \$300m Suit

By Stephanie Saul
Newsday
October 2, 2003

Twenty-seven Catholics who grew up in Brooklyn and Queens claim in a lawsuit that parish priests raped, sodomized and molested them as children in the 1950s, '60s, '70s and '80s.

Their allegations are contained in a \$300-million lawsuit filed yesterday in State Supreme Court in Queens that also accuses the leadership of the Diocese of Brooklyn of a "complex, well-organized, corrupt and successful scheme" to cover up the abuse.

The suit names 24 priests as defendants, including at least three who still work in the diocese. It alleges they committed sexual abuse in rectories, behind altars, in confessionals, in parish school offices, in shower stalls and at vacation homes. Five of the plaintiffs are women and 22 are men.

The abuse left them tormented with guilt and confused about their sexuality and destroyed their faith in the church, the alleged victims say. Some have suffered from alcoholism and drug addiction.

"I have no belief in the church itself. I do not go to church," said Salvatore Carlino, a Deer Park businessman who is one of the plaintiffs.

Carlino alleges he was molested by the Rev. Patrick Sexton during the 1980s at St. Cecilia's Parish in Greenpoint. Sexton, also the subject of other sexual abuse complaints, is no longer working as a priest. In the past, he has denied such allegations.

One of those accused, the Rev. Vincent Gallo, pastor of St. Pancras Church in Glendale, expressed shock at the allegation.

"You've taken me completely by surprise," Gallo said yesterday. "I've got to collect my thoughts." He would not respond to the claim he abused a young boy at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Bushwick during the 1960s.

Also named as defendants were two priests assigned to administrative positions on the diocese's marriage tribunal, the Rev. Hugo Bedoya and Msgr. Francis Mulhall.

Bedoya, contacted at the Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston, told a reporter to contact the diocesan leadership. Mulhall did not return a call seeking comment.

Frank DeRosa, a spokesman for the diocese, said officials would not comment until they had seen the lawsuit. "We have not been served with any papers," DeRosa said. "Without having seen anything of an official nature, we wouldn't comment on any aspect of the lawsuit."

The remaining priests apparently either have been suspended from the diocese based on sexual abuse allegations, have left the priesthood, moved away or died. One of the defendants, Romano Ferraro, faces criminal charges in Massachusetts for allegedly raping the son of a friend.

Yesterday's lawsuit is the second such suit filed against the diocese by attorney Michael Dowd. The first case, filed last October, named 42 plaintiffs and 13 priests as defendants. Eight of the clergymen named in the first suit also are named in yesterday's lawsuit, but by different alleged victims.

Among those named in both suits are Ferraro and the Rev. James Collins. Collins was suspended from his job last year at Bishop Kearney High School in Brooklyn, where his title was chaplain.

The new allegation accuses Collins of fondling an altar boy in the priests' residence of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs in Forest Hills, where he was assigned in the 1980s.

Last week, Dennis M. Brown, 44, of Ridgewood, who had claimed that Collins also molested him, died after apparently drinking antifreeze. The medical examiner has yet to rule on whether Brown committed suicide.

Brown had planned to be a plaintiff in the suit, according to Dowd, who said Brown's name will be added as soon as an executor is named for his estate.

Since his suspension from Bishop Kearney, Collins has been a volunteer bus driver for the women's softball team at St. Francis College in Brooklyn. A spokesman for the college said Collins has been accompanied by another adult at all times.

The suit may encounter legal hurdles because it involves abuse alleged to have occurred decades ago. Generally, victims of childhood sexual abuse in New York have until three years after they turn 18 to file lawsuits.

Dowd is asking that the courts ignore that time limit because, he alleges, the diocese engaged in a scheme to cover up the abuse.

State Supreme Court Justice Janice Taylor ruled against that argument earlier this year, dismissing Dowd's first suit. That decision is being appealed and Dowd predicted yesterday that it will be overturned.

He also said the new lawsuit contains another claim - fraud - that he believes will allow it to prevail.

Priests Named in Suit

Twenty-seven Catholics who grew up in Brooklyn and Queens filed claims yesterday against 24 priests. Here are the priests and the allegations against them:

FATHER JAMES COLLINS. Collins is accused of fondling an altar boy in about 1981, when he was a priest at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs in Forest Hills. The lawsuit claims that the abuse took place in the church rectory. The allegations in yesterday's lawsuit are similar to claims against Collins last year, all by males. The diocese suspended Collins last year from his most recent assignment, chaplain at Bishop Kearney High School, an all-girls school in Bensonhurst. Recently, Collins has been driving the van for the women's softball team at St. Francis College in Brooklyn Heights. A spokesman for the diocese has said that Collins denies any wrongdoing.

FATHER JAMES SMITH. The lawsuit includes two claims against Smith. It alleges that he molested a girl at Our Lady of Grace Church in Howard Beach in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It also alleges that he molested a boy at Holy Trinity Parish Church in Whitestone during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Smith was suspended last year as pastor of St. Kevin's Church in Flushing. More than two dozen people have come forward to complain Smith abused them as children. He has denied any improprieties.

FATHER JOHN MCLOUGHLIN. The suit claims that McLoughlin sexually abused two brothers while assigned to St. Mary's Nativity Parish Church in Brooklyn during the late 1960s. The suit alleges that the abuse occurred in the rectory and at a home in Rocky Point.

FATHER GEORGE STACK. The suit claims that Stack sexually abused two boys who attended Our Lady of Snows Parish in Floral Park in the mid-1960s. One of the boys committed suicide at age 29,

and the suit is filed by the administrator of his estate. The suit claims the abuse took place in a room off the principal's office at the parish school. A suit filed last year accused Stack of sexually abusing a male student in 1976, when he was assigned to the Cathedral Prep School. Stack is no longer working as a priest in the diocese.

FATHER THOMAS O'ROURKE. The suit alleges that O'Rourke abused an altar boy whose family he befriended while assigned to Corpus Christi Parish in Woodside, but the abuse did not occur until O'Rourke was reassigned to American Martyrs in Bayside. The abuse allegedly occurred on a trip the plaintiff took with O'Rourke in about 1974. A suit filed last year accuses O'Rourke of abusing an altar boy at Corpus Christi during the 1960s. O'Rourke died in 1998, the lawsuit said.

FATHER ROMANO FERRARO. He is accused of sexually abusing a boy while assigned to the Holy Family Parish Church in Canarsie beginning when the boy was 8 years old. The suit claims that Ferraro engaged in sexual misconduct with groups of boys during trips to a pool, on a school trip to New Jersey and at a home owned by one of the priest's friends. Ferraro, who was suspended by the diocese many years ago, was accused in a similar lawsuit last year of sexually abusing two boys at St. Joseph's Church in Astoria during the 1970s. Ferraro was arrested last year on charges in Massachusetts that he raped the son of a family friend. Those charges are pending.

FATHER EDWARD BRENNAN. The suit alleges that Brennan abused two sisters beginning when they were ages 9 and 7 at Good Shepherd Roman Catholic Church in Marine Park during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The abuse occurred in Brennan's room at the rectory, in the sacristy, at Brennan's weekend retreat home, at a gym, on a school bus and at a bowling alley, the lawsuit says. Last year's lawsuit included a similar claim against Brennan by another woman, who said she was also abused by Brennan while attending the Good Shepherd school. Brennan is believed to have died in 2000.

FATHER EDWARD MAURER. The suit claims Maurer sexually abused two boys, one at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs in Forest Hills during the 1970s and the other at St. Thomas Aquinas in Park Slope during the 1980s. At St. Thomas Aquinas, Maurer served as director of altar boys, the suit says. Maurer, whose whereabouts are unknown, was also a defendant in last year's suit, which accused him of abusing a boy who was also allegedly a victim of Collins.

FATHER JAMES FROST. One plaintiff claims he was abused by Frost over a period of eight years, beginning when he was 10 years old. The boy claims he met Frost at Holy Innocents Parish in Flatbush and that the abuse continued after Frost was reassigned twice - to St. Mark Parish in Sheepshead Bay and St. Sebastians in Woodside. Frost is no longer working in the diocese.

FATHER ROBERT FERRO. The suit accuses Ferro of abusing a young boy at St. Ephrem's Church in Bay Ridge during the 1970s. At St. Ephrem's, Ferro was responsible for the teen center and the altar boys. It accuses Ferro of abusing one boy several times in the priests' residence at St. Ephrem's. The suit says that Ferro's whereabouts are unknown.

FATHER RICHARD LEWKIEWICZ. The suit accuses Lewkiewicz of accosting and raping a 7-year-old boy as he was leaving Blessed Sacrament Church in Jackson Heights in 1970. The boy had been practicing for his First Holy Communion when, the suit claims, Lewkiewicz stopped him, took him to the confessional and raped him. Lewkiewicz apparently is no longer working as a priest and could not be reached for comment.

FATHER HOWARD RICHMOND. The suit alleges that Richmond watched as the alleged rape by Lewkiewicz occurred. Richmond could not be reached for comment.

FATHER PATRICK SEXTON. The suit alleges that Sexton molested Salvatore Carlino, currently of Deer Park, in the rectory of St. Cecilia's Church in Greenpoint. Carlino previously made his allegations public along with another man who claims he was abused by Sexton. Sexton is no longer working as a priest and is believed to be living in the Philadelphia area.

MONSIGNOR FRANCIS MULHALL. The suit claims that Mulhall fondled a girl when she was 7 or 8 years old in the rectory at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and in the confessional. Mulhall did not return a message left at his office at the Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston, where he works as the archivist on the marriage tribunal.

FATHER HUGO BEDOYA. The suit claims that Bedoya, currently a judicial vicar for the diocesan marriage tribunal, sexually abused an altar boy who was between the ages of 9 and 11. The abuse allegedly occurred at Fourteen Holy Martyrs in Bushwick, in the rectory, in the "ready" room before mass and on a church-sponsored trip. The suit alleges that, in addition to other odd sexual behavior contained in the lawsuit, Bedoya examined the genitals of his altar boys in a group to make sure they were clean. Bedoya, reached at the Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston yesterday, referred questions to the chancery office.

FATHER HERBERT J. MCELROY. The suit alleges that McElroy abused an 11- or 12-year-old boy during the 1950s at St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Springfield Gardens. McElroy served as the coach of the basketball team, and some of the abuse occurred on sports trips, the lawsuit claims. The suit says McElroy's current whereabouts are unknown.

FATHER JAMES RUSSO. The suit alleges that Russo, who was in charge of altar boys at St. Virgilius Parish in Broad Channel during the late 1970s, sexually abused a boy who was about 12 years old, taking him to his room in the rectory and forcing him to remove his clothes, where he fondled him. Russo is believed to have been assigned to a parish in Florida, but the lawsuit says his current whereabouts are unknown.

FATHER VINCENT SFORZA. The lawsuit says that Sforza was assigned to Regina Pacis Church in Bensonhurst in the late 1960s when he abused one of the plaintiffs, then a 14-year-old boy, in Sforza's room and in the corridor between the altar and Sforza's private room. Sforza could not be located.

FATHER JAMES SICKLER. He is alleged to have sexually abused an altar boy at St. Pancras Church in Glendale in the late 1950s and early 1960s. According to the lawsuit, Sickler asked the boy, then between 12 and 14, to join a "secret club" in the restroom of the parish elementary school. The handshake for the "secret club" involved manipulating each other's genitals, according to the lawsuit.

FATHER HAROLD T. COX. The lawsuit says that Cox, assigned to St. Gabriel Parish in New Lots during the late 1950s, sexually abused a boy between the ages of 11 and 14. The incidents occurred after confession, when the priest instructed the boy to meet him. The suit alleges that the incidents occurred 30 to 50 times.

FATHER VINCENT GALLO. The lawsuit alleges that Gallo, currently pastor at St. Pancras in Glendale, sexually abused a young boy while assigned to Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Bushwick in the late 1960s. According to the complaint, the boy was about 14. The lawsuit claims that Gallo asked him to bring sexually explicit pictures to confession, then watched as the boy masturbated. Gallo declined to comment yesterday.

FATHER HENRY J. MCCLOUD. The same plaintiff who alleges he was abused by Gallo alleges he was abused by McCloud, also at Good Counsel. McCloud's whereabouts are not known.

FATHER ANTHONY FAILLA. The lawsuit alleges that Failla sexually abused a young boy over several years after the boy's mother died and he went to live in the rectory. The abuse is alleged to have occurred about 30 to 40 times. As a result of complaints filed against Failla by several nuns, the Diocese of Brooklyn removed him from his assignment. But he was saying mass in Boca Raton, Fla., as recently as 2000. He could not be reached for comment.

FATHER PROTASIO SOARES. A female plaintiff alleges that Soares repeatedly sexually abused her, beginning when she was 9 while assigned to St. Bartholomew Parish in Elmhurst, where her parents were active members. The abuse occurred in the 1950s, the suit alleges.

Abstract (Document Summary)

FATHER GEORGE STACK. The suit claims that Stack sexually abused two boys who attended Our Lady of Snows Parish in Floral Park in the mid-1960s. One of the boys committed suicide at age 29, and the suit is filed by the administrator of his estate. The suit claims the abuse took place in a room off the principal's office at the parish school. A suit filed last year accused Stack of sexually abusing a male student in 1976, when he was assigned to the Cathedral Prep School. Stack is no longer working as a priest in the diocese.

FATHER THOMAS O'ROURKE. The suit alleges that O'Rourke abused an altar boy whose family he befriended while assigned to Corpus Christi Parish in Woodside, but the abuse did not occur until O'Rourke was reassigned to American Martyrs in Bayside. The abuse allegedly occurred on a trip the plaintiff took with O'Rourke in about 1974. A suit filed last year accuses O'Rourke of abusing an altar boy at Corpus Christi during the 1960s. O'Rourke died in 1998, the lawsuit said.

FATHER [Hugo Bedoya]. The suit claims that Bedoya, currently a judicial vicar for the diocesan marriage tribunal, sexually abused an altar boy who was between the ages of 9 and 11. The abuse allegedly occurred at Fourteen Holy Martyrs in Bushwick, in the rectory, in the "ready" room before mass and on a church-sponsored trip. The suit alleges that, in addition to other odd sexual behavior contained in the lawsuit, Bedoya examined the genitals of his altar boys in a group to make sure they were clean. Bedoya, reached at the Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston yesterday, referred questions to the chancery office.

Any original material on these pages is copyright © BishopAccountability.org 2004. Reproduce freely with attribution.