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Suits Filed against Priest for Sexually Molesting Boys

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A Catholic priest has been accused with sexually molesting three boys over five years in three suits filed in Brevard Circuit Court, it was reported Thursday.

The suits also name Bishop Thomas J. Grady of the Catholic Diocese of Orlando as a co-defendant, accusing the diocese of failing to take action even though it knew of the incidents, the Orlando Sentinel reported.

Merritt Island attorney Sheldon Stevens filed the suits on behalf of three clients, identified by the pseudonyms James Doe, John Doe and William Doe. The suits name Father the Rev. William Authenrieth, former pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Rockledge.

Stevens said the identities of the plaintiffs were not listed in the suits to protect their anonymity. The suits ask at least \$5,000 in damages for each plaintiff.

Authenrieth could not be reached for comment, nor could it be determined when he left the Rockledge church. His last assignment was at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Mount Dora, but he is no longer there, said Father the Rev. Nicholas King, vicar general of the Orlando diocese.

King said Wednesday he would not make any comment other than he was not aware that the suits had been filed.

Robert Pleus, diocese attorney, said he was made aware of the allegations "about two months ago" and said the diocese "did everything it could immediately to help" Authenrieth. Pleus said the diocese was unaware of previous complaints about Authenrieth.

Pleus said the priest began receiving psychiatric treatment after Stevens contacted the diocese about his plans to take legal action. Pleus would not disclose the priest's whereabouts.

The suits claim that on numerous occasions from June 1978 to September 1982, Authenrieth "encouraged, supported and fostered pedophilic, homosexual and sodomizing relationships with the children."

Also, the suits claim, Authenrieth used the "fear of the church" and the "wrath of God" to prevent the children from telling anyone.

The suits charge severe psychological damage to two of the clients, now 20 and 17 years old.

Authenrieth also had been assigned to All Souls Catholic Church in Sanford.