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Claims against Priest Surface Oswego County Woman, 26, Is One of Four with a Suit against Liam O'Doherty

By Mike McAndrew
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An Oswego County woman is suing a priest, claiming he pretended to be a licensed medical doctor and performed a pelvic examination on her at a Jefferson County church rectory.

The woman, 26, alleges the Rev. Liam O'Doherty - who is accused in two other pending lawsuits of sexually abusing two girls - physically examined her private parts in March 1998 at St. Michael Church rectory in Antwerp.

Posing as a licensed doctor, O'Doherty convinced the woman he had to rule out the possibility that her stomach ailments were caused by a reproductive system complication, according to the woman's lawsuit.

The woman alleges that when he told her he was a doctor, he pointed to framed certificates he had hanging on a wall.

The woman, who also named the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ogdensburg and St. Michael Church as defendants, sued for \$5 million in 2000.

The suit is pending in state Supreme Court in Oswego.

O'Doherty has made a general denial of the suit's allegations, said Paul Hanrahan, a Syracuse lawyer representing the diocese.

The woman claims the diocese and church were negligent in failing to warn worshippers that police had charged O'Doherty in 1979 with sexually abusing three 14-year-old girls while he was a priest at St. Ann Church in St. Regis Falls. The misdemeanor charges were dismissed six months later.

The woman alleges the diocese and church also did not warn worshippers that, beginning in 1992, they received complaints that O'Doherty was fondling young girls.

Hanrahan said he is not aware of diocese officials being notified of such complaints.

O'Doherty, 63, served as a priest at seven parishes throughout Northern New York from 1966 to 1998. He has been on sick leave from the diocese since late 1998.

O'Doherty is residing at a retreat for priests in Dittmer, Mo., and is not performing any public ministry, Hanrahan said.

Some of the residents at the Vianney Renewal Center are registered sex offenders, according to the Vianney Web site.

O'Doherty did not respond to a verbal request for an interview left Thursday at the Vianney Renewal Center. He also has not responded to a letter The Post-Standard sent to the center in March.

The Post-Standard was not able to contact the woman suing O'Doherty and does not identify alleged

sex-crime victims without their consent.

The plaintiff is one of four women - all of whom know each other - who have pending lawsuits against O'Doherty and the Ogdensburg diocese.

Two Syracuse-area women sued O'Doherty within the past two years, alleging he sexually abused them as children between 1985 and 1991 in the St. Andrew Church rectory in Sackets Harbor.

One of those women said she was 10 when O'Doherty told her in 1991 he was a medical doctor and told her to undress in his bedroom.

The other said she was 8 to 13 years old when O'Doherty, who told her he was a medical doctor, molested her on multiple occasions.

An Oswego-area woman, 52, also sued O'Doherty, claiming that he pretended to be a licensed psychiatrist, a medical doctor and a psychologist. She alleges in her suit that she underwent therapy sessions with O'Doherty from 1987 to 1999, when she discovered the fraud.

Lawyer Joyanne Amisano, who represents all four women, said they did not want to be interviewed.

Amisano declined to comment.

The Rev. Terry LaValley, the Ogdensburg diocese spokesman, could not be reached for comment.

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