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Case against 80-Year-Old Priest Delayed 4 Months

By Ernst Lamothe Jr.
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Gates — The prosecution and defense in the case against the Rev. John J. Steger, 80, will have four months to come up with an out-of-court settlement. Steger, a priest at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Gates, faces four misdemeanor charges involving inappropriate touching of a 12-year-old girl.

His case has been postponed until July 25.

"I'm not pleased that the case is being adjourned out that long. Any time there is a lengthy adjournment, it affects other court cases," said Judge Peter Papatelli. "I hope both parties expedite the process."

John Speranza, Steger's attorney, said both sides are working to come to an agreement, especially with Steger's medical condition, which includes problems with his legs and hands.

"I can't tell you how promising the talks are going to be," said Speranza. "But it's important to have added time to try to work things out."

Steger, who was arrested in May 2006, has pleaded not guilty to two counts of second-degree sexual abuse and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child based on incidents in late April and early May.

Police reportedly learned of the allegations after the girl reported two incidents to her parents.

If both sides can't settle, the next step will be a Huntley hearing, which is a New York state proceeding to determine if statements Steger made when being questioned by the Gates police will be admissible in court.

Steger has been a pastor at St. Jude on Lyell Road since 1968, but now is on administrative leave.

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