

BishopAccountability.org

South Carolina Priest Named in NY Abuse Complaint

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

April 29, 2003

Spartanburg, SC - A Roman Catholic priest who served in South Carolina for the past decade has been named in a lawsuit accusing him of sexually abusing a young man in a Long Island, N.Y., parish in the 1980s.

The Rev. Basil Peter Congro, most recently priest at Jesus, Our Risen Savior Catholic Church in Spartanburg, took administrative leave last fall. He is still a priest but may not be at his parish, wear clerical garb or perform public priestly duties, a spokeswoman for the diocese said.

A plaintiff in a civil suit filed April 14 claims the priest abused him in the 1980s when Congro was priest at St. Mary's Catholic Church in East Islip, N.Y. The plaintiff is a man who now lives in Florida.

Congro moved to South Carolina in the early 1990s, serving as pastor of St. Patrick and Our Lady of Mercy in Charleston, St. Mary on Yorges Island, Saints Frederick and Stephen on Edisto Island, and St. Anthony in Florence.

There are no other pending complaints of sexual misconduct against Congro, Bishop Robert Baker of the statewide Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston, said in a letter to priests last week.

The diocese decided to disclose the allegations because Congro was named in the lawsuit, said Maria Aselage, a spokeswoman for the diocese. The diocese learned of the allegations last June and its sexual abuse advisory board determined the case was "credible," she said.

The diocese would not say where Congro is now living but said he is not in South Carolina.

The diocese has acknowledged receiving allegations of sexual misconduct against 24 priests since the 1960s, and a dozen have been removed from ministry. About 4 percent of South Carolina's population is Roman Catholic.

In recent weeks, Bishop William Murphy of the Diocese of Rockville Centre says he has visited all 134 parishes on Long Island in an attempt to reach out to Catholics who may be disillusioned by the priest sex abuse scandal.

Thirty-four plaintiffs who say they were victims of sexual abuse by priests in the Long Island diocese this month filed lawsuits naming priests and the church hierarchy.

The suits follow a scathing Suffolk County, N.Y., grand jury report, which alleged the diocese repeatedly protected priests accused of sexual abuse by transferring them to other parishes.

Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota has asked Murphy to require diocesan officials to report sex abuse allegations directly to law enforcement officials