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Suits Claim Sex Abuse by Priest Two Civil Lawsuits Seek a Total of \$30 Million

By Gloria Wright
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Two multimillion-dollar civil lawsuits claiming a priest molested three Oswego County boys in the late 1980s are scheduled to go to trial today in state Supreme Court in Syracuse.

The suits accuse the Rev. Daniel W. Casey Jr. of sexually abusing two brothers, then ages 10 and 12, in December 1987 in a shower room at the State University College at Oswego, and of molesting an 11-year-old in the same area of Laker Hall twice between Aug. 1, 1988, and Jan. 31, 1989.

The families of the boys also accuse St. Paul's Church, St. Paul's Elementary School of Oswego and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse of negligence, saying they did not investigate Casey's background and did not know he could not be trusted with boys.

The family of the two brothers is asking for \$16 million in damages. The family of the then-11-year-old boy is suing for \$14 million. The lawsuits were filed separately but are being tried together.

Further details of the case are difficult to obtain because presiding Judge William R. Roy ordered the court file sealed.

The case does not appear on the court calendar, a public document.

Roy said Friday he sealed the court papers because the law requires him to keep secret the names of minors who might have been sex abuse victims. His copy of the court calendar shows the case listed under its own name, he said. The courtroom will be open for the trial, he said.

"... It's 'Open Sesame' with me unless the law tells me to do otherwise," Roy said.

Neither the lawyer for the families nor the priest returned telephone messages to request comment last week.

ACCORDING TO news accounts when the lawsuits were filed in 1991 and 1992, Casey was associate pastor at St. Paul's Church and was director of religious instruction at the parish's elementary school at the time of the alleged abuse.

He is accused of kissing and embracing the two brothers and of "speaking words of sexual endearment" to them. He is accused of going further than that with the 11-year-old, his mother told The Post-Standard in 1992. The mother said her son had attempted suicide and was treated for alcohol and drug abuse after allegedly being molested.

The Rev. Joe Zareski, assistant chancellor for the diocese, said Paul Hanrahan, the lawyer for Casey and the diocese, had advised the diocese not to discuss the allegations.

Zareski said he does not know Casey's whereabouts.

After leaving Oswego, Casey went to a church-run treatment facility in Maryland and then to Rochester, where he was studying for a doctorate. He was not allowed to minister as a priest, the 1992 news accounts said.

SO FAR, in about a dozen trials related to clergy sex abuse during the last decade, awards to individual plaintiffs have averaged about a \$1 million, according to the Aug. 1, 1997, National Catholic Reporter.

July 16, two brothers who accused the Catholic Diocese of Stockton, Calif., won \$30 million, one of the nation's largest judgments in a clergy abuse case.

The jury's award came less than a week after the Catholic Diocese of Dallas agreed to pay \$23.4 million to nine former altar boys who said a priest had molested them. The settlement came after the diocese told the court it could not pay the amount the jury had awarded in the case - \$119.6 million.

In both cases, the juries found the church had covered up abuse.

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