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Diocese Paid Accuser \$75,000 Church Ruled Allegations against Oswego Priest Were Credible

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The Syracuse diocese paid about \$75,000 in 1999 to a man who accused an influential Oswego priest of sexually abusing him as a teen.

Monsignor Francis J. Furfaro was required to undergo treatment for sexual abuse after diocesan officials determined the allegation was credible, Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Costello said Wednesday.

Costello said the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse compensated Jon K. Mosley to settle the sexual abuse complaint. He would not disclose the amount.

The settlement is the second the diocese has confirmed involving a priest accused of sexual abuse. In 1998, the diocese paid two Oswego families a total of \$475,000 to settle lawsuits that alleged the Rev. Daniel W. Casey molested three young boys in the 1980s.

Furfaro, 84, was one of Oswego's most prominent citizens for more than 40 years while serving at St. Joseph Church, 178 W. Second St.

He served on the Oswego city school board for 21 years. He also served as

chairman of the Oswego State University's College Council for years and helped choose college presidents. Furfaro at one point talked of running for mayor.

"I think he would have been elected," said former Oswego Mayor John T. Sullivan. "He had a very impressive career as a community member, as a mover and shaker."

In 1991, Furfaro retired as pastor of St. Joseph.

In December 1998, the diocese sent Furfaro to a psychiatric hospital for treatment after Mosley said the priest sexually abused him.

The diocese allows him to privately say Mass for cloistered nuns, said Danielle Cummings, director of communications for the diocese. Furfaro does not participate in public ministry, she said. He lives in Camillus with his sister.

Mosley was the first person to bring sexual abuse allegations against Furfaro to the diocese's attention, Cummings said. Diocesan officials would not disclose whether anyone else has accused Furfaro.

Friday, Furfaro answered a few questions before referring a Post-Standard reporter to his lawyer.

"Did something happen with Mosley?" he was asked.

"He was the only one," Furfaro said.

Furfaro said he didn't know Peter Losurdo III, a 43-year-old Oswego man who told The Post-Standard Thursday that Furfaro molested him in the mid-1960s when he was about 10 years old.

"Do you feel any remorse about what happened with Mr. Mosley?" the reporter asked Furfaro.

"Absolutely," he replied.

Mosley, 34, said he met Furfaro when his sister was being treated in a Syracuse hospital for a terminal illness. It's unclear how old Mosley was. He said he thinks he was 15 at the time. His mother, Katie Askew, said Furfaro met her son on the day Mosley's sister died. Mosley was 19 when his sister died in 1987.

He said Furfaro persuaded him to live in the rectory for months at a time, supplied him with alcohol, cash and pornographic movies. He said Furfaro pressed him into a sexual relationship that lasted after Mosley was married in the rectory in 1990.

Eight years later, Mosley said, he told a mental health therapist and other Oswego priests about the sexual abuse. A priest went with him to visit an Oswego lawyer representing Furfaro, Mosley said. Furfaro's lawyer gave him \$7,500 to move out of Oswego, Mosley said.

Mark Blum, a lawyer representing Mosley at the time, told the diocese Mosley wanted compensation for being sexually abused by Furfaro.

Diocesan officials confronted Furfaro about Mosley's allegations and sent him to Saint Luke Institute in Maryland for treatment, Costello said.

The diocese paid Mosley about \$75,000 in 1999 to settle the complaint, Mosley said. At the diocese's request, Mosley and his attorney signed an order agreeing not to publicly disclose the complaint against Furfaro or the settlement.

"In general, in the past the diocese often asked people to sign confidentiality agreements to avoid scandal," said the Rev. Michael Minehan, diocesan chancellor. "I don't think that's a wise policy."

Bishop James M. Moynihan, the diocese's top official, declined to answer further questions Saturday about the settlement against Mosley or any other allegations against Furfaro. Mosley's lawyer, Blum, also declined to talk about the settlement.

Since 1999, Mosley has been an inmate in Oneida Correctional Facility, serving a 1- to 3-year prison term for raping a 14-year-old girl in Oswego County.

He said he plans to ask the diocese to pay for him to undergo therapy when he gets out of prison. "I'm still not completely dealing with this abuse," Mosley said.

He said he's worried about the reception he will get in Oswego after he is released from prison.

"It's hard, when you create an issue like this, especially when the priest has a high reputation in a town, it's hard to deal with society because they're all looking at you like you're a bad person."

The Syracuse diocese is coming under increasing pressure as a result of the clergy sexual abuse scandal that erupted in Boston in January.

Onondaga County District Attorney William Fitzpatrick said Friday he has met with Syracuse diocesan officials to discuss proposed changes to its priest misconduct policy. The diocese is expected to announce changes to its policy this week.

Under the current policy, if an allegation of sexual abuse against a priest proves true, the priest's ministry is immediately limited or curtailed to ensure no other person is put at risk. The accused may be required to undergo psychiatric treatment.

The diocese does not require church officials to report allegations of abuse to law enforcement authorities.

For the past two months, a New York City private investigator, Joseph F. O'Brien, has been trying to locate other victims who allege Furfaro sexually abused them.

A retired FBI agent, O'Brien received the U.S. attorney general's Distinguished Investigator Award - the highest honor given to law enforcement officers in America - for his role investigating the Mafia.

O'Brien said he's interviewed three men who say Furfaro sexually abused them, including Losurdo.

Losurdo said he was an altar server at St. Joseph in the mid-1960s when Furfaro came to his family's home to talk to him about the priesthood. He said Furfaro molested him when his father left them briefly to go to the bathroom. Furfaro told him God would get even with him if he ever told anyone about the abuse, Losurdo said.

Losurdo said he never told anyone about the incident until the mid-1980s and he has never told diocesan officials about the incident. He does not plan to sue the diocese, Losurdo said, but would like Furfaro to apologize to him.

O'Brien said he has not received a response to his request to meet with Bishop Moynihan to discuss the findings of his investigation.

"I want the diocese to defrock Furfaro," said O'Brien, a Syracuse native who was hired by Sandy Smith, a parishioner of St. Joseph.

Smith said she hired O'Brien after hearing rumors about Furfaro. "I love my church and I want to find out if the rumors are true," Smith said.

Emil Rossi, Furfaro's attorney, would not answer questions about allegations against the priest.

"If anybody raises a single piece of evidence of wrongdoing on monsignor's part and that piece of evidence is within the statute of limitations, we'll respond," Rossi said.

He said he would not discuss allegations that may be as old as 30 or 40 years.

Furfaro has been upset about publicity about the nationwide priest sex abuse scandal, Rossi said.

"It's been beyond devastating," he said. "His health is bad. His frame of mind is very frail. He's had a very, very distinguished career as a priest. I just hope he'll be remembered in the context of his service and not in the context of ancient allegations."