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Abuse Suit Seeks \$150 Million

Man, now 54, accuses the Rev. James Quinn. Suit also names Syracuse diocese.

By Renee K. Gadoua
Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY)
May 8, 2003

A \$150 million lawsuit accuses a prominent Syracuse priest of sexually abusing a boy 40 years ago.

The Rev. James F. Quinn, 69, director of the Office of Vocation Promotion, has "agreed to go on temporary leave until he is exonerated," according to a statement from the Syracuse Diocese. Since 1994, Quinn has recruited candidates for the priesthood.

[Photo caption: The Rev. James Quinn speaks about the priesthood during a visit to Bishop Ludden High School in Geddes in 1995. File photo/Stephen D. Cannerelli, 1995.]

According to a lawsuit filed Friday in Oneida County, Quinn sexually abused and exploited the boy from 1963 to 1970. At the time, Quinn was assistant pastor of St. Agnes Church, Utica. The church also operated a grammar school, which the boy attended. The abuse began when the boy was 13, the suit says.

The suit, filed by Utica lawyer Frank Policelli, seeks \$100 million in compensatory damages and \$50 million in punitive damages. It is the largest amount sought in at least 11 lawsuits against the Syracuse Diocese since the priest sex-abuse scandal began.

"My client is the poster boy of victims," Policelli said. "He shows what 40 years after the abuse is like. We're going to be able to prove this."

He said his client is a 54-year-old single man who lives in Oneida County. He said his client is unable to work or maintain relationships as a result of a mental disorder caused by the abuse.

The Post-Standard does not identify victims of alleged sexual abuse. There was no answer at a Utica residence where a phone is listed in the man's name.

Policelli is representing five other clients in suits that accuse three other Syracuse priests of sexual abuse.

The latest suit names Quinn, Bishop James Moynihan and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse as defendants. It accuses the diocese of conspiring to conceal the abuse, and of failing to report criminal conduct.

The suit also says that after the diocese learned of the lawsuit, the man received telephone calls pressuring him to drop the suit.

Quinn said the accusations sadden and shock him. In a prepared statement, he called the allegations "completely false and utterly baseless." He said his lawyer, Emil Rossi, advised him not to answer any questions about the suit or his relationship with the accuser.

According to the lawsuit, Quinn provided alcohol and had sex with the boy several times when he was a minor.

The suit says Quinn and the boy stayed in the same hotel room during numerous trips - some to conduct diocesan business - while other boys stayed in separate rooms.

"In addition to utilizing the power and authority of his position to pressure plaintiff into continuing the abuse and maintaining his silence about it, Quinn also resorted to bribery, in the form of cash payments as well as a supply of clothes, trips, alcohol and a car," the suit says.

Policelli said he plans to claim the statute of limitations does not apply in this case because the client's mental disorder incapacitated him, and the diocese's policies did not prevent the abuse.

"The mental disorder he suffers from is directly related to the abuse he suffered at the hands of Father Quinn," Policelli said.

He would not discuss any mental health diagnosis regarding his client.

"(He) was so traumatized by Quinn's abuse that he began self-mutilation, cutting himself with razor blades, and also attempted suicide a number of times," the suit says.

Policelli described his client as "fragile." The recent death of his client's mother spurred him to pursue the lawsuit, Policelli said.

"He wanted to rectify the situation for his mother's sake," he said.

Danielle Cummings, director of communications for the diocese, said the case will be referred to the diocesan review board for investigation.

She said the diocese has received no other allegations of sexual misconduct against Quinn.

The Rev. James F. Quinn

Born: Sept. 21, 1932

Ordained: May 24, 1958

Appointments:

St. John the Baptist, Syracuse, temporary assistant pastor, June 5, 1958

St. Patrick Church, Syracuse, assistant pastor, Aug. 27, 1958

St. Agnes Church, Utica, assistant pastor, Sept. 16, 1959

St. Paul Church, Rome, assistant pastor, Sept. 17, 1971

St. Theresa Church, Munnsville, assistant pastor

St. Paul Church, Whitesboro, pastor, July 1, 1978

St. James Church, Syracuse, pastor, July 1, 1988

Director of Vocation Promotion; in residence at St. Ann Church, Manlius, July 1, 1994

Source: Syracuse Diocese

Quinn's response

The Rev. James F. Quinn responded Wednesday to questions about the lawsuit with this prepared statement:

"It was only last Friday that I was informed of this outlandish report. I am shocked and really disappointed learning about these false allegations and subsequent lawsuit. I can tell you that I know the individual filing the lawsuit and I can also tell you, and let me emphasize this, the allegations are completely false and utterly baseless. I treasure the priesthood. I have greatly valued my 10 years of

encouraging others to consider a church vocation. I have loved every day of my 45 years as a priest. This is very hurtful to me and to those who know me. Finally, I know that I will be exonerated, and I pray for this individual who feels, for whatever reason, he must come forward with this untruth."

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