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Quinn Faces Negligence Allegation in Drowning

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A priest accused of abusing a teenage parishioner in the 1960s is facing negligence allegations relating to the 1968 drowning death of another boy.

Lawyers for the Rev. James F. Quinn, who was assistant pastor at St. Agnes Church in East Utica, will be in court Tuesday, June 29, for a hearing before Justice Robert Julian relating to allegations that he was not present when 12-year-old Albert Piacentino drowned during an altar boys' picnic at Camp Nazareth, though he was the sole adult in charge.

Quinn, who has denied the allegations, was unavailable for comment Monday.

The suit, filed by the boy's mother, Anna Marie Piacentino, seeks \$150 million in compensatory and punitive damages from Quinn and the Catholic Diocese of Syracuse. The hearing will determine whether the statute of limitations on the death has expired, despite new information.

Quinn also is accused of repeatedly sexually abusing John Zumpano in the mid- to late-1960s, beginning when Zumpano was an eighth-grade student at St. Agnes. In investigating that case in 2003, Zumpano's lawyer, Frank Policelli, said he uncovered information indicating Quinn may have failed to adequately safeguard the children at the picnic.

"We were told he had supervised the outing the entire day. ... We had no reason to doubt the word of our parish priest," Anna Marie Piacentino's statement reads.

It was not until 2003 that she learned Quinn might not have been present when her son died.

But Quinn has denied both charges.

"I find it abhorrent that this tragic and totally unrelated accident is being used in an attempt to discredit my name and my priestly ministry," he said in a previously released statement. "My thoughts and prayers are with Mr. and Mrs. Piacentino for the pain they must be feeling with this thoughtless reminder of the loss of their beloved son."

The Syracuse Diocese has declined to comment publicly on the matter, but noted that Quinn had denied the charges.

A key affidavit in the case was presented by Donald Zumpano, John Zumpano's brother.

According to Donald Zumpano's statement, several boys at the picnic were engaging in horseplay. When it became apparent that Albert Piacentino was missing, Donald Zumpano went to look for Quinn, but could not find him. When he called St. Agnes' rectory for help, he found Quinn there, instead of at the camp.

"To my knowledge, Father Quinn had not informed any of the people at Camp Nazareth that he was leaving," Donald Zumpano's affidavit reads.

The June 29 hearing also will address the question of whether the law firm representing the diocese has a conflict of interest in the case. Hancock & Estabrook represented USAir when it was a defendant in a case relating to a 1985 incident in which John Zumpano, then a USAir staffer, sued

Globe Business Furniture when one of his testicles was nearly severed when a chair he was sitting on collapsed.

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