

Priests

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are truly the victims of sexual abuse."

He also denied any conspiracy on the part of the diocese. He also said the diocese will fight the charges in court.

The sweeping lawsuit lists 38 plaintiffs, and charges a pattern of sex abuse by priests in the diocese for more than 50 years.

It names the Diocese of Camden, the Diocese of Providence, R.I., the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, the National Catholic Conference of Bishops, one nun, several lay people and 27 present or former priests, six of whom are dead, as defendants.

Suit names 3 former area priests

Assigned to Vineland, Landisville parishes

By PAUL FOWLER
Staff Writer

Three priests who were known sexual offenders were assigned to parishes in Vineland and Landisville in 1964, a lawsuit charges.

"I have no comment on this at all," Monsignor Joseph Stoerlein, pastor of Sacred Heart Church, said.

"It's too intricate, too much involved. It has to play itself out," he added.

The class-action suit, filed Monday, accuses church leaders of covering up years of sex abuse by priests in many Diocese of Camden parishes.

The lawsuit states that church officials were aware of the deviant sexual activities of the priests when they were assigned to this area. The priests are the Rev. John "Jack" P. Connor, then of St. Francis of Assisi Church on West Chestnut Avenue in Vineland; the late Rev. Francis J. Flemming, who taught at Sacred Heart High School on North East Avenue in Vineland; and the Rev. Patrick Weaver, then assistant pastor at Our Lady of Victories on Railroad Boulevard in Landisville.

Flemming also was a visiting priest at St. Pius X Church in Cherry Hill at the time and is named in numerous sexual abuse counts in the suit.

Weaver was convicted twice in Camden Superior Court in the 1980s for sexual assaults on children in the diocese, the suit said.

The priests are listed among the 15 "perpetrators" that church officials knew about in 1964, the suit says.

A major point in the plaintiff's case is that church officials were aware of abuse by priests and took no measures to prevent it.

Earlier this week, Bishop James McHugh issued a statement in which he said the diocese is "extremely sensitive to the suffering of those who
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