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Man claims priest molested him in 1968

By **LORI BURLING**
Associated Press

An Owensboro man who claims he was molested by a priest more than 30 years ago is suing the Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, saying it failed to supervise the priest and concealed its knowledge of the alleged abuse.

The alleged abuse victim is not identified in the lawsuit filed Thursday in Daviess County Circuit Court. The plaintiff wants to remain anonymous to protect his privacy and that of his family, according to the lawsuit.

The suit names as defendants the diocese, Monsignor George Hancock — who was chancellor at the time — and unidentified individuals who were employees or taught at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish school.

The priest accused of the alleged abuse in the suit, the Rev. Raymond Waldruff, is not named as a defendant. No telephone listing for Waldruff could be found, and Suzanne Cassidy, a Covington attorney representing the plaintiff, said she did not know where Waldruff is now.

The diocese said it did not keep records on Waldruff after he left Owensboro. Waldruff worked as an associate

pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Daviess County from June 15 to Aug. 15 in 1968, according to Sister Joseph Angela, chancellor of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro.

"We have no knowledge or record of any allegations in 1968," Sister Joseph Angela said Thursday. "The former bishop and others who worked with him are not living at this time. We have no one here that knows Waldruff."

Waldruff was employed at the Owensboro parish through an assignment from an order with two provinces, one in Florida and one in Pennsylvania. Calls to both offices of the Franciscans Third Order Regular order were not returned Thursday.

According to the suit, the alleged abuse occurred around 1968, when the plaintiff was 11 years old or younger and was a member of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The suit claims that on numerous occasions during 1968, Waldruff physically and sexually abused the plaintiff by kidnapping him, forcing alcohol down his throat, fondling him, and forcing the plaintiff to engage in masturbation and acts of oral sex. The suit says the diocese and others had the responsibility to properly screen and supervise the

priest.

Sister Joseph Angela said diocese records on Waldruff include only letters from the Franciscans asking for Waldruff to be placed in an Owensboro parish.

"The letters were all very complimentary," she said. "Nothing that would suggest that he had prior problems."

It was disclosed in January that a Boston-area priest who had been suspected of abuse was moved from parish to parish over the years, and since then dozens of priests across the country have been suspended or forced to resign amid similar allegations. However, Cassidy said the recent scandals were coincidental to the timing of the Owensboro suit.

She said the lawsuit had been in the works for some time. Bishop John J. McRaith, of the Diocese of Owensboro, said the plaintiff spoke with him about the alleged abuse within the last year.

"I listened to his allegations, noted them and offered counseling for him," McRaith said Thursday. "There was little we could do because the bishop and pastor that were at the diocese at the time of the allegations are dead."

The Daviess County commonwealth's attorney's office said it had no record of

any criminal complaint in the case.

Monsignor George Hancock, who was chancellor of the Diocese of Owensboro in 1968, is currently at St. Anthony's in Grand Rivers, Ky.

"I have no recollection of a Waldruff; I was chancellor at the time, but I don't know anything about this," Hancock said Thursday.

Hancock referred other questions to the diocese's lawyer, Charles Kamuf, of Owensboro. Kamuf said he had not yet read the suit but was aware of its allegations.

"I've been the diocese's attorney for 25 years," Kamuf said. "We have researched these allegations. We have turned our records over to the plaintiff's lawyers."

The Owensboro plaintiff is represented by the same Covington lawyers — Cassidy and Michael O'Hara — who represented a Northern Kentucky man who successfully sued the Diocese of Covington over sexual abuse by a priest.

In 1995, a Kenton County jury awarded John Sexter more than \$700,000 in his suit over abuse by the Rev. Earl Bierman while Sexter was a student at Covington Latin School in the mid-1970s. Bierman is serving a 20-year prison sentence.