

April 19, 2007 - Church settles suit accusing four priests of abuse
St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis, MO, by Christopher Leonard, AP

ST. LOUIS (AP) -- A Missouri man has settled a civil lawsuit against four priests in the St. Louis area he claims molested him during the 1970s and 1980s, an activist group announced today.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, said the settlement involves three priests who have not previously been accused publicly of sexual abuse.

The settlement for \$140,000 was finalized Monday, said SNAP Director David Clohessy. The lawsuit was filed in 2004 and the victim declined to be identified, Clohessy said.

The four priests named in the suit are Thaddeus Posey, Michael Barry, Chester Gaiter and James Theil. Gaiter, Posey and Barry have not previously been accused of molestation publicly, according to SNAP.

Barry is deceased, while Gaiter and Theil have retired from the priesthood. Theil lives in Grand Rapids Mich. and Posey's whereabouts are unknown, Clohessy said.

While the priests are no longer active in St. Louis, the city's archdiocese should make a larger effort to publicize the names of accused molesters, Clohessy said.

"That's what helps victims heal, and that's what restores the faith of many Catholics," Clohessy said.

Monsignor Richard Sika said the St. Louis Archdiocese has formed committees to review abuse allegations and make sure the church is transparent enough when allegations arise.

The archdiocese did not investigate the four priests accused in the recently settled lawsuit, because the priests belonged to Catholic orders with separate leadership structures, Sika said.

Sika said the archdiocese agreed to pay one-third of the settlement price because the abuse allegedly occurred on church property.

The remaining two-thirds of the settlement was split evenly between the Jesuit and Redemptorist orders, Sika said.

The Jesuits of the Missouri Province released a statement Thursday saying it took all accusations of abuse seriously, but couldn't confirm whether allegations laid out in the lawsuit were true.

"Because of the circumstances of the case, it was not possible to substantiate any of the allegations," the statement said.

Redemptorist spokeswoman Kristine Stremel said the Vatican dismissed Theil from the priesthood in 1997. She confirmed the settlement but couldn't comment further, citing privacy rights of those involved.