

8-4-08 - Suits charge former Salesianum priest with sex abuse
By ESTEBAN PARRA, The News Journal (DE)

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The lawsuits charge that Catholic officials suspected or knew about the abuse but did little or nothing to stop it.

According to the suit, the abuse occurred between 1983 and 1987 when the Rev. Dennis Killion was a teacher at the all-boy Catholic school in Wilmington. Killion belongs to a religious order called the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, based in Wilmington and Philadelphia.

Killion recently was assigned to St. Bede the Venerable Parish in Holland, Pa., as an associate pastor. The church runs a kindergarten through eighth grade school adjacent to the site. Archdiocese of Philadelphia officials did not return comment.

When word of the allegations came out this morning, the Rev. Kevin Nadolski, director of communications of the Oblates, said Killion was placed on administrative leave and assigned to the Oblates' retirement facility in Childs, Md.

“On behalf of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, we certainly take these allegations seriously and as pastors we take our responsibility to protect children and to ensure quality ministry very, very seriously,” Nadolski said. “The speedy action of our provincial Father Jim Greenfield to place Father Killion on administrative leave and ensue with the investigation I think is evident how serious we take the allegations.”

The Oblates have hired an independent agency to conduct an investigation, Nadolski said.

Before coming to the Delaware Valley, Killion most recently worked as activities director at Bishop Verot High School, a Catholic school in Fort Myers, Fla. Diocese of Venice (Fla.) officials said Killion transferred on June 1.

Although Bishop Verot's principal, the Rev. Chris Beretta, said Killion requested the transfer, Nadolski said this happened because the school did away with his position as it restructured.

“His ministry was no longer needed in Florida,” said Nadolski, assuring that Killion's “transfer from Bishop Verot High School was part of the normal course of transfers that occur within a religious community.”

Killion, who also has worked at schools in Philadelphia and Maryland, started at Bishop Verot on July 1, 2006.

“Prior to his employment at Bishop Verot High School, he successfully completed the screening procedures of the Diocese of Venice, including a criminal background check and a positive recommendation and clearance from his provincial,” Diocese of Venice officials said in a press release. “The Diocese of Venice was not aware of any allegations against Father Killion prior to his coming to Bishop Verot High School, nor has it received any complaints about him while he was here.

“Father Killion’s reassignment was not the result of any allegations of misconduct,” the Diocese of Venice statement said.

Joelle Casteix, a regional director for the advocacy group SNAP, which stands for Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, pleaded with Beretta before an 11 a.m. press conference on the sidewalk of Bishop Verot to do outreach with parents to find other potential victims and connect them with law enforcement.

"You may have boys here now who are suffering and in pain," she said.

Beretta said his staff is trained to recognize signs of abuse and that he'll address parental concerns when school starts Aug. 11. The principal said Killion passed background checks before he was hired and that his transfer was done under "normal" circumstances. He said Killion rarely had one-to-one contact with the school's 750 students.