

9/03/07 - Diocese places priest on administrative leave after allegations

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DAVENPORT, Iowa (AP) -- The Diocese of Davenport has placed a priest on administrative leave after four people complained he sexually abused them 30 years ago.

However, it is too late to file criminal charges against him, Scott County's top attorney said Sunday.

The Diocese of Davenport announced Sunday that it put the Rev. Gerald Stouvenel on administrative leave July 27. The statement, released Sunday by the office of the Most Rev. Martin J. Amos, bishop of Davenport, said that Stouvenel will stay on leave until an investigation is complete.

According to the diocese, four more people have made claims in the bankruptcy case filed by the diocese claiming that Stouvenel sexually abused when they were minors more than 30 years ago.

Stouvenel was ordained on August 12, 1972.

Scott County State's Attorney Mike Walton said Sunday that the statute of limitations sets the timeframe for filing sexual abuse charges involving a minor at 10 years after the individual turns 18, so no charges from the four could be brought against Stouvenel.

"This is beyond the statute of limitations for criminal charges," Walton said. "You have to look at when (the alleged incident) occurred and apply the statute of limitations from that time."

Walton said the diocese routinely forwarded complaints it received to his office for review.

Earlier this week, a bankruptcy judge the diocese more time to file its bankruptcy reorganization plan, approving the diocese's request to extend the deadline to Oct. 1.

It must be approved by Nov. 30, although the original deadline was Aug. 15.

The request to extend the deadline was submitted by the diocese and the creditors committee, which includes alleged victims of abuse by priests.

The diocese filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in October 2006 in the face of mounting clergy abuse lawsuits. A total of 156 claims from alleged abuse victims have been filed in the case, according to court records.

The reorganization plan will detail how the diocese will emerge from bankruptcy and how much it will pay its creditors, many of whom are abuse victims.