

12-2-07 - Documents shed more light about clergy sex abuse cases in R.I.
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PROVIDENCE, R.I. --More details about clergy sex abuse cases in the Roman Catholic Church in Rhode Island are coming to light as documents turned over to alleged victims by the court begin surfacing as trial exhibits or in motions.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs say the documents add details to what was already known about sex abuse by priests and the church's efforts to cover it up.

One letter discovered in the archives show how church officials reacted in 1979, after Woonsocket police began investigating an allegation that the Rev. Roland Lepire of St. Aloysius Church had put his hands down a boy's pants.

Auxiliary Bishop Kenneth A. Angell suggested transferring Lepire.

"For confidential reasons, Fr. Roland M. Lepire now at St. Aloysius, Woon must be transferred at once," Angell wrote on stationery bearing the church's seal.

"He should not be reassigned in the Woonsocket area."

Church officials have been criticized for simply transferring priests accused of sexual abuse rather than removing them from any contact with children and others.

Angell's handwritten note is among tens of thousands of pages documents slowly coming to light. They paint a fuller picture of what church leaders knew and did over the past three decades about allegations of sexual abuse.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence had hoped to put the issue behind them when it settled three dozen sexual-abuse cases for \$14 million in 2002.

But the cases of plaintiffs who hadn't settled is forcing the church to make public documents it had hoped would remain private.

The Rhode Island Supreme Court ruled against an appeal by the diocese, ordering they open their files to lawyers for the plaintiffs, though under a court seal.

Some of those documents have begun to trickle out. In one document a lawyer for the church, wrote that he told an accused priest not to say anything about "misconduct" that he might be obliged to report to officials. Instead, Murphy wrote, the priest should tell then-Bishop Louis E. Gelineau, in a private conversation similar to confession, because "that would provide some significant measure of protection."

Church officials say that the lawyer's motives are being misinterpreted, and that he was just trying to get to the truth.

They also defended their handling of the sex abuse lawsuits.

"I'm very comfortable we have been and will be forthcoming," the Most Rev. Thomas J. Tobin, who became the bishop in Providence in 2005, said in an interview with The Providence Journal. "We have nothing to gain in being less than honest and forthcoming in these matters, especially since we know this is subject to court review."

Both sides had entered mediation on the remaining cases, but Tobin decided not to settle, saying that the plaintiffs sought an unreasonable amount of money, and that it wouldn't have been fair to the church.