

[Jury selection starts in priest abuse trial](#)

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STAMFORD

Jury selection is scheduled to begin this morning in the civil trial of a Roman Catholic priest accused of molesting a Trumbull altar boy in the early 1990s.

The Superior Court lawsuit, filed against the Diocese of Bridgeport, charges that the church hierarchy failed to protect children from the Rev. John Castaldo.

Ernest Teitell, who with Paul Slager, represents the former altar boy, confirmed jury selection is scheduled to begin this morning, but Monday declined further comment on the case.

Diocesan spokesman Joseph McAleer said the diocese does not comment on pending cases.

The lawsuit claims Castaldo kissed the then-13-year-old altar boy on the mouth at least five times in the sacristy at St. Theresa Church in Trumbull in 1990.

It states the priest took the plaintiff and two other altar boys on a trip to Disney World in Florida in August 1991 and sexually assaulted the plaintiff during that trip.

Castaldo served as parochial vicar at the Trumbull church from 1987 to 1992. The priest did not face criminal charges in connection with the Trumbull case.

After his Trumbull post, Castaldo was subsequently reassigned by then-Bishop Edward Egan to St. Mark in Stratford, where he served from 1992 to 1994. He then went to St. Edward the Confessor in New Fairfield from 1994 to 1998 and St. Rose of Lima in Newtown until 1999.

In May 2001, Castaldo, 46, then chaplain at Trinity Catholic High School here, was suspended following his arrest in an Internet sting operation run by authorities in Westchester County, N.Y., and charged with trying to entice an underage boy he contacted via the Internet to have sex.

Police said Castaldo posed on the Internet as a gym teacher and attempted to solicit sex from someone he thought was a 14-year-old boy. He later pleaded guilty to the charge and was sentenced to one weekend in jail and five years probation.

Because Egan, now cardinal of New York, was in charge of the Bridgeport diocese at the time of the alleged molestation, the plaintiff's lawyers have sought to have him deposed or give a pre-trial interview under oath.

Egan initially resisted, but recently agreed to give the deposition. However, sources said that neither a date nor location for the deposition have been agreed upon.

The deposition could lead to Egan having to testify during the trial, which diocese sources say they want to avoid.

During a similar civil trial in federal court in New Haven in 1997, Egan, testifying by videotape, claimed that neither he nor the 268 priests in the Diocese of Bridgeport are diocesan employees.

"Every priest, like every minister or every rabbi, is self-employed," he said.

That testimony so upset parishioners that Egan wrote a letter, which was read at Mass in every church in the diocese, to explain his testimony.