

## Lawyer says abuse priest implicated Paterson bishop in coverup

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NEWARK, N.J. (AP) \_ A former Roman Catholic priest accused of sex abuse implicated his former bishop in a cover-up, according to transcripts of an interview filed Thursday in a lawsuit against the Diocese of Paterson.

The allegations of abuse mainly involve students at a diocesan elementary school in Mendham, St. Joseph's Catholic School, during the 1980s.

The transcripts were part of a response to a motion by the diocese seeking to dismiss the suit on grounds that the statute of limitations has expired.

The lawsuit was filed in January in state Superior Court in Morris County.

The interview was conducted without a lawyer for the priest present, and therefore does not constitute a deposition that would be admissible in court as evidence.

But, the plaintiff's lawyer Gregory Gianforcaro, said the interview can be used by Judge Deanne M. Wilson in weighing whether to dismiss the suit.

In the interview, conducted last fall by Gianforcaro in former priest James T. Hanley's Paterson apartment, the lawyer asks Hanley when former Bishop Frank Rodimer, the principal defendant in the suit, became aware of the abuse allegations and how he responded to them.

Rodimer, who retired in July, is not accused of abuse himself, but rather of failing to supervise his abusive priests and of disregarding victims' complaints.

"In approximately 1984, September, I received a call from the office to come down," Hanley says in the transcript. "And the bishop told me that a young man had come forward to Father (Kenneth) Lash and father (Michael) Drury that I had abused him while I was at St. Joseph's. And the bishop said his name was Mark Serrano. He said, 'Is this true?' and I said, 'Yes, Bishop, it is.' I never denied it outright. (I) said yes, it's so.' The bishop said, 'Well, Jim, I want you to know that you're not the only one.'"

Later in the interview Hanley says of Rodimer, "I think he felt in control of the situation as long as Mark didn't tell his parents."

Marianna Thompson, a spokeswoman for the diocese, declined to comment on Hanley's statements.

Thompson said the diocese has until Sept. 27 to respond to the plaintiff's filing, after which the judge will review the submissions and schedule arguments on the motion.

She said Rodimer was not available for comment. A call to his lawyer, Stephen S. Weinstein, was referred to the diocese.

Hanley has a nonpublished telephone number.

Apart from the Hanley interview, Gianforcaro contends the statute of limitations has not lapsed, because it only applies after victims become conscious that abuse had occurred. Victims of abuse typically suppress those memories, he said.

Mark Serrano, who two years ago broke a confidentiality agreement that was part of his own 1987 sex abuse suit against the diocese, said Hanley's recollection of Rodimer's inaction was consistent with his own.

"He told me he had met with Father Hanley, Father Hanley had admitted the abuse, and it was his job to forgive Father Hanley and give Father Hanley another chance," Serrano said of Rodimer.

"This is the first time that we have seen a priest-perpetrator acknowledge the scope of his crimes and reveal the story of a cover-up from his bishop," Serrano said.

Gianforcaro said Hanley was not named as a defendant in the suit because of his cooperation. Prosecutors have said the statute of limitations on criminal charges against Hanley has lapsed.