

Victims Relieved Church Admits Abuse Took Place

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By DANIEL TEPFER

October 17, 2003 - Agreeing to pay \$21 million to settle sexual-abuse claims filed by 40 people, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport admits to what it tried to conceal for more than 30 years, two local victims said Thursday.

"The church is finally acknowledging [that] this wasn't a made-up story; it really happened to me and that is a positive step," said one victim named Jerome, a Milford resident speaking on condition that his last name not be used.

"The church did something wrong and they showed such disregard and weren't compassionate about it," said another victim, Jerry from Trumbull, also speaking on condition of partial anonymity.

"Instead, they moved these priests around and that was just wrong for a church."

On Wednesday, the diocese agreed to pay \$21 million to 40 people who said they'd been abused by 16 priests of the diocese since the 1960s.

The diocese has agreed to pay the victims \$5 million by the end of the year, with the remainder to be paid in four installments.

Jerome, 49, the middle of eight children born to religious parents in Bridgeport, said he was abused by the now-deceased Rev. Joseph Gorecki over a three-year period beginning when he was 6 years old. He and his family attended Sts. Cyril & Methodius Church in Bridgeport.

"Father Gorecki told my parents I was such a timid boy, but he would watch out for me," he said.

He said Gorecki began coming to their home on a regular basis. "It was like Christ was coming to my house."

Jerome said he and the priest would often sit alone in the family's parlor. "He would have an oversized pillow over my crotch and his hand would be under it," he said.

The priest would often take him to the movies and they would sit in the back, Jerome said. "He would have a box of popcorn and would put it on his lap and tell me, 'Wait, I'll butter it.' "

Jerome said that when he was in the fourth grade he finally told his mother what the priest was doing to him. His mother complained to one of the nuns at school and shortly thereafter, he said, Gorecki was "gone."

After spending some time outside the diocese, Gorecki was reassigned first to St. Joseph's Parish in Shelton and later to St. Theresa's parish in Trumbull. He died in 1988.

Jerry, 50, broke into tears as he described the close relationship he had with his father, a local dentist.

Jerry's father died when he was 13. At a gathering at their home after the funeral, Jerry said he sought solace from the Rev. Martin Federici.

"My father always told me if I was ever in trouble, the priests would take good care of me," he said.

Jerry said that during the gathering, Federici took him aside and began trying to box with the boy.

"I didn't want to do it, but he kept at me and I ended up hitting him in the face and his nose began to bleed," Jerry said. "I felt terrible and we began hugging but it was an uncomfortable hugging."

Over the next year, Jerry said he often found himself alone with the priest at the rectory at St. Theresa's parish in Trumbull, as well as day trips they took together, such as one to a pool in Norwalk. In each case, Federici would molest him, he claimed.

"I felt something was wrong, but I kept telling myself what my dad had always told me, 'Priests are supposed to take care of you,' " he said.

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