



Ex-Millville priest named in alleging child sex abuse, cov

Group helps victims

By GARY MILLER
Staff Writer

When the three alleged sexual abuse victims from Millville went public Thursday, they became the tip of an iceberg being called the "most significant moral crisis of the century the church is facing."

That is according to Barbara Blaine, president of Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, who said that there are more than 100,000 victims like the three who accused the Rev. Joseph F. McGarvey, a former St. Mary Magdalen pastor, of sexually abusing them in the 1960s and '70s.

SNAP was first formed by Blaine in January 1990 to provide support to victims of priest abuse.

"We really underestimated the number of victims," said Blaine. "We thought we'd have maybe 30 or 40 people across the country. We figured we would be able to get together for a weekend, talk it out and get on with our lives."

But Blaine, who said she was abused by a priest in Toledo, Ohio, while in high school, said she found out that sexual abuse by priests is much more common than she had originally expected.

"My story is common all across the country," Blaine said. "We get together to talk it out, and we find we're all saying the same thing."

Blaine said it is common for victims to go to church officials with their accusations, only to have them silenced.

"The church kept saying they never heard any accusations of abuse about him so there must be something wrong with me," she said. "It turns out they've known since the early '70s about the allegations."

"I went to the church in 1985 and it took until 1993 to have him re-



Alfia M. Hayes of Millville hugs her son, the Rev. Gary R. Hays, formerly of Millville, after a news conference Thursday in Philadelphia. They joined three other Millville residents in a suit accusing a former local priest of child sexual abuse 20 years ago.

moved from the ministry."

That was one reason for starting SNAP, Blaine said, to give victims somewhere to go without having

their problems denied or buried.

"We tell people to learn from our pain and not to go to the church to find healing," she said.

"When you go to the church, you become a victim. It's really a form

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Alleged v says famil

By JEAN JONES
and GARY MILLER
Staff Writers

A Millville man said his family has been devastated by allegations made public Thursday that his son was sexually abused more than 20 years ago by a priest at St. Mary Magdalen Church in Millville.

Steven M. Stolar and his son, Steven, have joined three other current and former Millville residents — including a priest — in a lawsuit alleging widespread fraud and sexual abuse of young parishioners in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Rev. Joseph F. McGarvey, a former pastor of St. Mary Magdalen Church now living in Audubon, and the Rev. William J. O'Connell of Providence, were named Thursday as defendants in a lawsuit accusing them of conspiring to create a cover-up of a sex ring between Rhode Island and New Jersey from 1968 to 1972.

"When this happened, it was a devastating time for our family because of my son's behavior, because of Father McGarvey," said the elder Stolar, who spoke reluctantly when contacted at his Millville home Thursday night.

"We didn't know what was the matter," he said. "It was a terrible time. There are hundreds, maybe thousands — of people who were the victims of these priests."

Other plaintiffs in the case are former Millville resident Gary Hayes of Henderson, and current Millville residents Terrence Smith, and Alfia Hayes, the Rev. Hayes' mother.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Camden, also charges that church leaders covered up the abuse. It is believed to be the first class-action case involving sexual abuse by priests filed under racketeering statutes, said plaintiffs' attorney Stephen C.

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— Steven M. Stolar
alleged victim's father

bino of Ventnor.

It seeks unspecified damages
under those statutes, which are
usually used to prosecute
organized crime figures.

The lawsuit alleges that
McGarvey and O'Connell, who
was last assigned to St. Mary's
parish in Bristol, R.I., before
resigning from the priesthood in
1985, traveled back and forth
between the two states specifically
to molest Hayes and another
young boy.

It accuses high-ranking church
officials of obstructing justice by
sending incriminating documents
to the Vatican under diplomatic
immunity and then destroying
them to cover up the abuse.
Accused pedophiles were also
repeatedly reassigned when abuse
charges surfaced, the lawsuit
charges.

The case is also the first lawsuit
by a priest pressing formal
charges against church officials
for childhood sexual abuse by a
cleric, Rubino said.

The case was brought by SNAP,
or Survivors Network of Those

Please see Lawsuit, page 5-A

Lawsuit

Abused By Priests. SNAP President Barbara Blaine said the plaintiffs tried to solve the problem privately but the Roman Catholic Church repeatedly interfered.

"They never wanted it to come to this and they worked real hard to avoid public disclosure," Blaine said of the plaintiffs. "They wanted to solve it privately. But they felt like they were pushed into a corner. It was with a lot of pain and sadness that they made that choice."

The parents are filing suit because of the emotional hardship the abuse caused their families.

"SNAP is trying to get these scumbags out of their protective slots in the church ... (McGarvey was) hiding behind something almost like God. It's despicable," the elder Stolar said.

He said he did not know about the abuse of his son until recently.

"We never knew anything about this problem until about three weeks ago," he said. "Gary Hayes engaged Mr. Rubino and somehow Terry Smith got into the picture and my son got into the picture."

"We never suspected what was going on," Stolar said. "Back in those years, you never imagined something like that. Tom Smith and his wife didn't know what was happening to their son and Gary's family didn't know what was happening to him. Three weeks ago, it all came together."

"There was a terrible, terrible amount of upheaval in our family that McGarvey caused," he said.

The younger Stolar, 39, said he wishes he could have come forward earlier.

"It's hard for me to explain how I let my parish priests take advantage of me for so many years," Stolar said in a statement released to the media. "But I know they were wrong and I wish I had come forward sooner."

Hayes, ordained in May 1990, said he was saddened by the impact the high-profile case will

have on fellow priests. He said he had no choice but to file the lawsuit.

"I am seeking justice in the courts because I could find no justice in my church," Hayes said at a news conference Thursday at a Philadelphia hotel. "I would like to see children able to come to church and not have their innocence violated."

He said that despite what happened, he still plans always to be a priest.

"This is the church that he dedicated his life to," said SNAP's Blaine. "He wants that (alleged abuse) out of his church."

"We were lured in with a false sense of security," said Smith, 39. "We were putting our faith in the church. The church betrayed that trust."

McGarvey is on a leave of absence from his current parish in Runnemede, said the Rev. Carl Marucci, spokesman for the Camden diocese, who declined further comment.

A spokesman for the National Conference of Bishops and the U.S. Catholic Conference in Washington, D.C., also declined comment on the lawsuit.

The lawsuit also accuses four bishops — including the Rev. James T. McHugh, the spiritual leader of the 374,000 Catholics in southern New Jersey's Camden diocese — of fraud and conspiracy for covering up the abuse. McHugh was not available for comment Thursday.

The lawsuit seeks to have the court certify a national class action suit for victims and their parents from the two dioceses. It also seeks to create a national registry of known priests who have molested children.

Four other New Jersey priests employed by the Camden diocese were also named as defendants involved in the cover-up.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

SNAP

of 'revictimization.'"

SNAP is also trying to get the church to cooperate better with the victims, Blaine said.

"We're trying to get bishops to sign a covenant saying that they would not attack victims that come forward," she said. "We're convinced that bishops don't do it out of maliciousness."

Instead, Blaine feels the cover-ups are part of the defense because the church officials don't know how to deal with the problem.

"I think that they have been ignorant of the effect it has on the church and they've been at a loss of what to do with their priests," she said. "We can provide them information about the priests because in many cases we've grown up with them."

The irony of the new allegations is that they come fresh on the heels of a statement earlier in the week by Pope John Paul II asking visiting American bishops to pray for clerics and their victims involved in sex scandals in the United States, saying the incidents risk undermining public trust in priests.

Blaine said that statement is a big turnaround from the former papal stance on abuse by priests.

"It's definitely a change from the statement he made a few months ago, because he said being a pedophile is not a reason to re-

move a priest from the priesthood," Blaine said. "He's not very concerned with the children of the American Catholic Church."

Upon hearing this week's statement, she said, "Maybe he'll be changing his record."

The pope's comments are not the only change by the church regarding abusive priests, according to Blaine.

"Diocese after diocese has set up numbers to call, but victims don't feel that there's been anything different," she said. "Learn from our pain, don't go to the church."

"The bishops are turning their moral judgement over to their attorneys. What they don't realize is that is not in the best interest of the victims or the church."

Blaine said the Rev. Gary Hayes, one of the three alleged victims in the Millville case, tried futilely to get help from the church before going public and filing the suit.

"It hurts him that he has to make this so public and make just one more instance of disillusionment against the Catholic Church," she said.

Blaine urged anyone who has been abused by a priest to call SNAP at (312) 483-1059.

"Our purpose is to provide support and healing and our goal is to help the victims," she said.