

# 'John Doe' in suit alleging abuse by priest goes public

Plaintiff hopes to foster understanding.

By GEORGE MAZURAK  
of the Tribune's staff

The anonymous accuser in a lawsuit charging a Roman Catholic priest with sex abuse two decades ago has stepped forward publicly, saying he wants to show that people should not be ashamed if they were molested as children.

In a damages suit filed last month in Cole County, St. Louis political consultant David Clohessy was identified only as "John Z. Doe."

The suit alleges that the Rev. John Whiteley of Columbia sexually abused Clohessy from 1967 through 1971, when Whiteley was minister to a Catholic parish in Moberly.

Whiteley has declined interviews since the petition was filed Aug. 2.

The suit seeks an unspecified amount of money from Whiteley, the diocese based in Jefferson City, Bishop Michael McAuliffe and the St. Plus X Church in Moberly.

Clohessy contends that his memory of the abuse had been repressed until about three years ago during a counseling session. Mental health professionals say it is not uncommon for sexual abuse victims to repress such memories until they are recalled years later.

Clohessy, 34, said he initially wanted anonymity to have more time to deal with the trauma of coming to terms with his past and to screen family members from publicity.

But Clohessy said he also had wanted to promote understanding of child sexual abuse, particularly for adults who had long repressed its memory.

With that goal in mind, Clohessy sought to publicize the anonymous petition by leaving copies of it with media outlets in central Missouri on the day it was filed in court. He also spoke to reporters about the case, either on condition of anonymity or while declining to give his name.

Even then, Clohessy said he had mixed feelings about remaining anonymous.

Several factors influenced him to go public, Clohessy said, including Tribune news stories last month that linked his name to the lawsuit. Clohessy was a spokesman for the Natural Streams Act campaign last year in Missouri.

"I felt uncomfortable from the outset with trying to remain anonymous," he said today. "But I am absolutely convinced that I have nothing to be ashamed of and that everyone who was sexually abused has nothing to be ashamed of. With anonymity, it's a possibility that some people would not get that impression."

Since filing the suit, Clohessy said he has received "a lot of support from friends, and from strangers. There's been some criticism, too, but it's an intense subject."

Clohessy said that filing the suit had been therapeutic, although he described the past month as "emotionally draining."

"For a long time, I felt very helpless" because of the abuse, he said. "Certainly I feel less helpless now. I wanted others to see they could follow that route and pursue legal action long after the fact. If I've made it easier for somebody to take those legal steps, I'll feel great."

Attorneys for McAuliffe contend that the lawsuit has no legal standing because the statute of limitations for seeking damages from the alleged abuse expired at least 15 years ago.

Clohessy said that state law permits damages actions to be filed within three to five years after alleged victims become aware of damages.

Cole County circuit judge Byron Kinder has not scheduled a hearing for arguing that issue.