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5 sue diocese, claim priests abused them

By MARK REITER
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Five men who claim they were sexually abused by priests in the 1970s and 1980s filed lawsuits yesterday in Lucas County Common Pleas Court against Toledo's Roman Catholic diocese.

Two complaints allege that sexual misconduct was committed by Dennis Gray, a former priest who was accused of similar sexual molestations in nine lawsuits filed last year against the diocese.

The diocese also was sued by three men who alleged they were sexually abused in the 1970s by two Redemptorist priests at St. Gerard Catholic Church in Lima, Ohio.

The men, who refer to themselves as John Does in the complaint, accused the Rev William Geiger and another priest of sexually molesting them. The name of the second priest is identified only with a surname. However, The Blade has chosen not to publish it because his full name was not available.

Attorney David Zoll, who filed the lawsuits on behalf of the men, said the diocese would not provide a full name of the priest who was at St. Gerard when the boys were allegedly molested. There were four priests in the order during that time frame with the same surname.

"We asked for additional information, but this is all we have been given," Mr. Zoll said.

The filings bring the total number of lawsuits against the diocese for alleged sexual abuse involving children and teenagers to 16. Eleven of the complaints accuse Mr. Gray of sexual misconduct.

Mr. Gray, who left the priesthood in 1987, was dean of students at Rogers High School until last year.

However, he was forced to step down in September following an article in The Blade that revealed allegations of sexual misconduct while he was a religion teacher at Central Catholic High School.

Several days later, six people filed lawsuits accusing Mr. Gray of misconduct and claimed the diocese covered up the abuse for years.

Dane Brubaker and Marc Steinbaugh alleged in separate filings that they were molested by Mr. Gray in the 1980s while they and their families were members of St. Joseph Church in Maumee.

The allegations are similar to those raised in the previous complaints in that they accused Mr. Gray of abusing them at his cottage at Crystal Lake, Mich.

Mr. Brubaker, of Cave Creek, Ariz., and Mr. Steinbaugh, of Arizona City, Ariz., also said they were molested at the church and the rectory in Maumee.

Mr. Gray could not be reached for comment.

The Rev. Thomas Quinn, diocesan director of communications, said the priests at St. Gerard Church were not under the supervision of the diocese. "They were never diocesan priests," he said.

Father Quinn referred questions to attorney Thomas Pletz, of Shumaker Loop & Kendrick, the diocesan legal

counsel. Mr. Pletz said he was unaware of the allegations and could not comment because he had not read the lawsuits.

A person who answered the telephone at the Redemptorist order in Brooklyn, N.Y., said Father Geiger was assigned to a parish near Charlotte, N.C. Father Geiger could not be reached for comment.

The suits seek more than \$25,000 in compensatory damages and an unspecified amount in punitive damages.

Mr. Zoll said the victims were 6 to 10 years old when they allegedly were abused at the parish in Lima and were unable to recall the priest's given name. "These kids were real young. Some of these boys have true suppressed memories," he said.

Mr. Zoll also represents some of the victims in the previous lawsuits against the diocese, including those involving Mr. Gray. He said efforts are being pursued for release of personnel files of priests and former priests accused in the complaints.

"The diocese has been successful in covering up these records for over 20 years. We will not be content until we have exhausted every avenue that is available to have those records released," he said.
