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Former local clergyman named in sex abuse lawsuit

By The Spectator

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Late Fr. Collins served in Hornell, Canisteo, Rexville

ROCHESTER — A Catholic church leader who served in the Hornell area in the 1950s and 1960s was named Wednesday in a lawsuit against the Diocese of Rochester on behalf of sexual abuse survivors under New York State's Child Victim's Act.

Jeff Anderson & Associates, along with attorney Steve Boyd of the law offices of Steve Boyd in Buffalo, filed 30 lawsuits Wednesday, naming 19 alleged clergy perpetrators who worked in the Diocese of Rochester.

Among them was the late Fr. Vincent Paul Collins. A web search of an online database states Collins served as an assistant pastor at St. Ann's Church in Hornell from 1957-1963. He was also reportedly an Assistant Pastor at Church of the Assumption in the late 1950s.

From 1963-1968, Collins reportedly served as a pastor in Rexville and Canisteo at St. Mary's Church and St. Joachim's Church. He then moved on to St. John of Rochester Church in Perinton from 1968-1980.

While Collins spent over a decade working in the area, the alleged child abuse that spurred Wednesday's lawsuit did not occur locally. Attorneys told The Spectator the alleged child sexual abuse occurred at St. John of Rochester Church in Perinton from approximately 1970 to 1971.

In 1969, Collins authored "Me, Myself and You," identified as a million-copy self-help best seller. He also authored the pamphlets "Grief," "Acceptance" and "Partnership." A brief biography states Collins was active in the field of alcoholic

rehabilitation and the leader of many Alcoholics Anonymous retreats both locally and nationally.

Collins died Feb. 3, 1980 at the age of 64.

Of the 19 clergy named in Wednesday's lawsuit, 11 of them, including Collins, were identified for the first time. Each case came about from survivors of alleged abuse bringing forth lawsuits. The alleged victims were not identified.

"We're suing church organizations in all of these cases," Boyd said during a Wednesday press conference in Rochester. "In many cases that's the Diocese of Rochester. That could be an order such as the Franciscans or the Jesuits or any of the other orders. That could be a parish, that could be a school. Any church organization that gave these predators access to children would be among those named in these lawsuits because it's a case of negligent retention, negligent supervision of the people that they employed and the people they oversee."

Stacey Benson, an attorney with Jeff Anderson & Associates, encouraged any other survivors of abuse to come forward.

"One of the things that survivors want is to know they're not alone. If you're watching this and you see a name, you can know you're not alone," Benson said. "We feel that this is a public safety imperative in the sense that all these names should be out there. The diocese shouldn't be hiding them. They should be telling their communities where these people are, where they worked and what they knew. We do call on the bishop here in Rochester to release that information and really be transparent to help survivors in their healing process."

In addition to the lawsuits against clergy, Boyd said the team has 20-30 cases of other types of abuse in schools, scouting and other organizations in the 7th Judicial District seated in Rochester. Those lawsuits will be filed eventually, stated Benson.

In all, 427 sex abuse lawsuits were filed by 5 p.m. Wednesday across New York. Some of the cases have one plaintiff, while others include several dozen.

The state's statute of limitations had been among the nation's most restrictive before state lawmakers extended it earlier this year for new cases. The Child Victims Act gives victims until age 55 to file lawsuits and until age 28 to seek

criminal charges, compared with 23 under the old statute.

That law, which passed following more than a decade of debate in Albany, also created the litigation window.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.