

Suit Accuses 2 Priests Of Sex Abuse

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A woman alleges in a suit filed Wednesday that a Catholic priest here had sex with her while she took a bath nearly 40 years ago, when she was a first-grader.

In addition, the suit filed in St. Louis Circuit Court contends that another priest sexually abused the woman, Kathleen Woodard, for nine years in the 1950s and 1960s.

Woodard's suit said she began recalling the incidents in 1990 while undergoing psychotherapy.

The suit says the bathtub incident occurred in about 1954 at the home of Woodard's aunt.

Defendants include the two priests

and the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Woodard says she cannot recall the name of one priest; the Post-Dispatch is not disclosing the name of the other priest because no criminal charges have been filed. The archdiocese's chancellor, the Rev. George J. Lucas, said Woodard's claims were unfounded. The archdiocese investigated her allegations, which were brought to the attention of church officials about 18 months ago, Lucas said in a statement.

Woodard, 44, of Florissant, was unavailable to comment. Her husband, Thomas Woodard, is a co-plaintiff.

The Woodards allege that the priest was acting as a baby-sitter when he sexually abused Kathleen Woodard about 1954.

Woodard's attorney, Douglas A. Forsyth, said Woodard entered therapy because of vague recollections of violence against her. "She was having flashbacks, but she wasn't sure what of," Forsyth said.

Missouri law allows suits alleging childhood sexual abuse even if the acts alleged took place many years before. A section of the law gives a plaintiff three years to file suit after discovering a psychological injury caused by abuse.