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Notorious priest named in abuse suits

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When the Rev. Eugene G. Emo was arrested in 1996 for molesting a developmentally disabled man, some of his parishioners said they weren't surprised. They had suspected for years that Emo, who once served in Tioga County, New York, had an unholy attraction to boys and vulnerable men.

But those parishioners accused Rochester diocesan leaders of covering up for Emo for years, transferring him from one church to another after people began to talk.

In one case, salacious photos and a pair of handcuffs had been found in Emo's quarters, and money was missing from the parish's till. The diocese's response was to whisk Emo away with no explanation and, a year later, send him to another church 50 miles away.

A protected predator

The allegation that church leaders protected Eugene Emo was aired anew on Monday in a half-dozen lawsuits that accuse the former priest of sexually abusing boys in the 1960s and 1970s.

The suits were filed by six men who grew up attending St. Mary Church in the Livingston County village of Dansville. Emo was the associate pastor there from 1968 to 1973.

The six plaintiffs, now in their late 50s and early 60s, said in their legal papers that Emo cultivated their friendship, and then sexually abused or molested them.

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The Rev. Eugene Emo at St. Januarius in Naples in 1992. FILE PHOTO

Priest

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The acts allegedly occurred in the church's sacristy — a private room in the church to which priests have access — and in the rectory, or church residence. Some abusive acts also occurred at a rural residence Emo owned in Co-hocton, Steuben County, about 15 miles from Dansville, the court papers said.

The six suits were filed by state Supreme Court in Monroe County by a group of lawyers including Mitchell Garabedian, the Boston lawyer known for representing sex abuse victims highlighted in the Boston Globe's investigations.

A seventh man who said he was molested by Emo at St. Mary in Dansville brought suit in August. He was represented by a different firm.

Both that suit and those brought this week by Garabedian assert that church officials were aware of Emo's proclivities before he ever arrived in Dansville.

"It should not be difficult to show that supervisors knowingly covered up the sexual abuse of Father Emo. This is another example of Catholic Church leaders putting profit before the safety of children," Garabedian said Tuesday.

One more suit coming

Garabedian said he and his partners intend to file one more suit against Emo that will allege he sexually abused a minor while he was preparing for the priesthood at St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester in the 1950s.

Emo, who is 84, could not be reached for comment Tuesday. His last known address was in central Florida.

The diocese declined comment "out of respect for the legal process and the claimants."

Emo, who was ordained in Rochester in 1961, served at a church in Tioga County and at St. Cecilia's in Irondequoit before being sent to St. Mary Church in Dansville.

After leaving there in 1973, Emo was had six postings in 14 years before landing at St. Januarius in Naples, Ontario County.

Frequent moves from one parish to another are sometimes seen as a sign of a troubled priest.

"Father Emo was transferred sometime after one year. It's ridiculous. He was just transferred and transferred," Garabedian said. "These are red flags."

Emo remained at St. Januarius until the summer of 1993, when he was "suddenly and mysteriously" removed, as a

parishioner once put it to the *Democrat and Chronicle*, after the financial and sexual-misconduct allegations arose.

"We've known for some time that Father Emo is a man who has a very serious problem," a member of the church's parish council told the newspaper then.

Emo was placed on leave, which Garabedian said likely was a euphemism for being sent away for treatment of sexual compulsion.

A year later, Emo moved to Holy Trinity in Webster, where he lived and assisted the pastor. The lawsuit filed in August claimed that Emo sexually abused a minor there as well, though no details of any such allegation have been made public.

Emo had moved to Blessed Sacrament in Rochester when State Police appeared in February 1996 to place him under arrest.

They accused Emo of molesting a 33-year-old man whose disability left him unable to consent to the conduct. The priest was charged with felonies that could have sent him to prison for seven years, but was allowed to plead guilty to a single misdemeanor charge.

Suits now possible because of CVA

Emo, who admitted in court that he suffered from "an addiction," was given six months in jail. However, he violated his probation in 1999 by having contact with a teenage boy, and spent two years in state prison as a result.

He was thrown out of the priesthood.

In the wake of his 1996 arrest, the State Police reported receiving many additional allegations of sexual misconduct on Emo's part, some dating back to the early 1960s.

But police said the statute of limitations made prosecution impossible, so they took no action and released no information publicly about Emo's past actions.

At the time, the diocesan officials said very little about Emo and their handling of the allegations laid against him over the years.

Then-Bishop Matthew Clark wrote an opinion column for the *Democrat and Chronicle* in which he avoided any discussion of Emo's case and did not take up the claims of a diocesan cover-up.

Instead he focused on the diocese's procedure for responding to abuse allegations, and offered assistance and an apology to "any and all persons who have ever experienced this kind of injury."

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