

Court reverses disclosure order in priest's case

St. Paul, Minn. (AP)

The names of those who accused a Roman Catholic priest of sexually abusing girls cannot be disclosed unless a trial court determines the allegations were false and were made in bad faith, the Minnesota Supreme Court has ruled.

The justices, in a unanimous decision to be filed today, ordered a Brown County District Court judge to review evidentiary files in the case, which did not result in any charges against the Rev. Michael Guetter.

Judge Noah S. Rosenbloom in June 1986 ordered that the 71-year-old priest be told the name or names of those who had accused him of sexual misconduct while he was at St. Paul's parish in Cornfrey, Minn. That order was upheld 2-1 by the Minnesota Court of Appeals last February.

An investigation by the Brown County Family Service Center and the sheriff's office produced no evidence to support the allegation against Guetter, which had become public knowledge, according to court documents. The authorities announced their finding and took no other action to protect minors under Guetter's care, court records state.

But Guetter contended that damage to his reputation was exacerbated when the authorities added to the announcement that "general allegations of improper conduct by Father Guetter were supported."

He argued that his reputation could be rehabilitated only if he could publicly expose the falsity of the accusations or the motives of his accusers.

The Supreme Court ruled that the names of Guetter's accusers cannot be disclosed until the trial court has inspected the case files and issues written findings that the report was false and made in bad faith.