

Ex-Palma employees accused of abuse

Alumni to receive notices on Aug. 1 claim deadline

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Palma High School in Salinas has been identified as one of the Christian Brothers schools that employed brothers or priests who were accused of child sexual abuse.

The Herald has learned that former Palma students will receive court-ordered notifications that they have until Aug. 1 to make an abuse claim or lose their right to do so in the future. A lawyer for one Palma alumnus said he is readying a claim.

The action rises out of the April bankruptcy filing by the Irish Christian Brothers and the Christian Brothers Institute of New York in the wake of sexual abuse claims.

An attorney representing the plaintiffs in the claims said the court agreed to issue the Christian Brothers a "bar date," or claim deadline, on the condition they identify all schools where alleged perpetrators were employed.

On Feb. 7, John McCarthy, chairman of Palma's board, sent a letter to alumni informing them they would be receiving an official notification and assuring them "NO ONE on Palma's staff is named in the court document."

"Our assets may not be used to satisfy any claims in connection with this filing," the letter stated.

Brother Patrick Dunne, Palma's president, said Friday that he is aware of no claims of sexual abuse by a Palma student in the 24 years he has been at the school.

"Abuse is a terrible thing, that's for sure," he said. "If people have done things that are wrong, they certainly should be held accountable."

He stressed Palma is not a party to the

bankruptcy and its financial status is not threatened. Though he is a member of the Irish Christian Brothers order, he said, Palma and the land under it are owned by the Christian Brothers Institute of California Inc., which is legally a separate entity.

John Stang, attorney for the claimants' committee, said it will be up to the court to decide what are the assets of the Irish Christian Brothers.

"Whether (Palma's) assets will be used is yet to be determined," he said. "Obviously Palma was put on the list for a reason. The brothers acknowledged that one or more perpetrators worked at Palma."

Mike Reck, a Newport Beach attorney, said Dunne's distinctions between the Irish Christian Brothers and the corporation that is Palma is like distinguishing between a Salinas Ford dealer and Ford Motor Co. when a Pinto blows up.

"It's a distinction without a difference," he said. "The question is not what corporate identity the school is. The question is, did the school expose students to perpetrators?"

His client says it did. Reck said he is preparing a lawsuit and a creditor's claim in the bankruptcy case alleging the man was sexually abused by a Crosier priest who taught at Palma in the mid-1980s.

That priest is one of three alleged perpetrators the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) says worked at Palma since 1964. The other two alleged offenders will be "outed" at a press conference at 11:45 a.m. Monday outside Palma's grounds. Representatives of the group, abuse survivors and a former priest who claims to have helped the Roman Catholic Church shuffle sexually abusive clergy around the country will be present.

Joelle Casteix, regional director of SNAP, said one of the alleged molesters taught in the 1960s and was once convicted of possessing child pornography. She said at least three former students have alleged molestation by him in lawsuits against the Irish Christian Brothers.

Two of the three men previously taught at Damien Memorial School in Hawaii. Casteix said one of them came to Palma from Damien after allegations of sexual abuse in Hawaii.

Dunne initially said he never heard of that man, but checked and confirmed he worked at Palma in the 1980s. He said his file indicated he was hired with the approval of the Diocese of Monterey and the Crosier provincial and includes no mention of abuse allegations in Hawaii.

Dunne said another of the three was principal of Palma for six years and that he was unaware of any claims of sexual assault against him. Casteix said the former principal has been accused of abuse by at least two boys, one of whom has filed a claim in the bankruptcy court.

She said the alleged victim, a former Irish Christian Brother himself and currently a retired priest who advocates for abuse victims, will be present at Monday's press conference.

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