

Three more claims of sexual assault made by Palma alumni

Move will bring number of allegations to six

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Posted: 07/30/2012 11:19:47 PM PDT

Updated: 07/30/2012 11:19:47 PM PDT

Facing a Wednesday deadline, a Seattle attorney said he will file three new claims on behalf of Palma High School alumni who say they were sexually assaulted by Father Gerald "Jerry" Funcheon in the 1980s.

Michael Pfau said the three men all came forward after well-known alumnus Steven Cantrell announced he was filing suit and making a claim in the Irish Christian Brothers bankruptcy case in New York. Cantrell, the brother-in-law of Palma coach Jeff Carnazzo, alleges Funcheon assaulted him on an overnight trip.

The new claims bring to at least six the number who have alleged abuse by the priest, who was chaplain and a teacher at Palma from 1984 to 1985. Most allege they were assaulted on weekend trips.

Funcheon was transferred to Palma after parents leveled molestation claims against him at Damien High School in Hawaii.

Another attorney, Mike Reck, said two men asked him to file claims after Cantrell went public. One alleges abuse by Funcheon. The other claims he was assaulted by Brother Jerome Heustis, Palma's principal from 1976 to 1982.

Heustis, who is now dead, was accused of molesting a student at Essex High School in Newark, N.J., before coming to Palma. The man later committed suicide.

The flurry of claims comes in the countdown to the Wednesday deadline for alumni of Irish Christian Brothers schools to file sexual abuse claims in connection with a bankruptcy in New York.

The Irish Christian Brothers and the Christian Brothers Institute

of New York declared bankruptcy in April 2011 in the face of dozens of lawsuits alleging sexual molestation by brothers and priests at their schools.

While most of the lawsuits originated in the Seattle area, the bankruptcy opened a window to victims of abuse at all Irish Christian Brothers schools, including alumni whose statutes of limitations had long expired for civil or criminal complaints.

In February, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert D. Drain set an Aug. 1 "bar date" for those "creditors" to file claims.

Palma High School President Brother Patrick Dunne has expressed sadness regarding the allegations while stressing that the school is a separate corporate entity and not run by the Irish Christian Brothers.

However, because of a lawsuit filed in Washington, it is one of the named parties in the bankruptcy. The religious order has also identified Palma as one of the schools where accused molesters taught and its real estate holdings are under review by the bankruptcy court.

Reck, who practices in New York and Newport Beach, said he is working around the clock.

"We are working very full days right now," he said. "A lot of survivors are finding the strength to come forward with the deadline looming."

Because the claims are confidential unless the complainant also files a lawsuit, it is not and likely will never be publicly known how many have filed claims.

Pfau said his three new clients will also be filing lawsuits against Palma, though it was not yet decided if they would do so using their own names rather than aliases. Cantrell said he did so to support another alumnus who filed publicly, Christopher Spedden, and to encourage other survivors to come forward.

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