

Men allege abuse, sue religious order in Cook court

3 high schools run by Christian Brothers cited



Chicago Tribune religion reporter Manya Brachear with details on a lawsuit brought against the Congregation of Christian Brothers accusing them of allowing teachers to abuse students in three local schools. (Posted on: April 30, 2013)

By Manya A. Brachear, Chicago Tribune reporter

5:49 p.m. CDT, April 30, 2013

Unable to get restitution in federal bankruptcy court, 31 Chicago-area men have filed a lawsuit in Cook County Circuit Court, accusing the Congregation of Christian Brothers of putting them in harm's way decades ago.

In three lawsuits filed Friday, plaintiffs accuse the religious order of allowing teachers to abuse them decades ago at Brother Rice, Leo and St. Laurence high schools.

More than half of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit claim they were sexually abused by a member of the order who was later convicted in Washington state of indecent behavior. According to the lawsuit, the religious order knowingly shuffled that brother to each of the three schools because of the allegations against him. One principal recommended the accused brother to a public school system in Washington.

Of the 15 men who allege abuse at Leo High School, a dozen claim they were sexually abused between 1969 and 1973 by the brother. Of nine men at St. Laurence High School between 1961 and 1996, three point to the brother. Of eight men who filed claims against Brother Rice for allegations between 1962 and 1984, one accuses the brother.

Eleven other brothers and two laymen also are named in the suit.

Kevin Burns, president of Brother Rice, said all staff now must undergo training that teaches them to identify warning signs and prevent child abuse.

"These things go back years," Burns said. "All I can tell you definitively is it doesn't involve our current staff."

When Christian Brothers declared bankruptcy in April 2011, the religious order notified alumni that they could file claims through U.S. Bankruptcy Court. Attorney Mark McKenna, a graduate of St. Laurence, received a letter himself. He said the 31 plaintiffs he now helps represent are still waiting for compensation.

The Tribune is not publishing the names of brothers listed in the lawsuit because they have not been convicted of abuse at any of the three schools, and it is not known whether the order has substantiated the allegations against them.

Christian Brothers could not comment because they had not seen the lawsuits, said Steve Mangione, a spokesman for the order. They would not confirm whether any of the brothers had substantiated allegations against them. Until now, the accused brothers' names have been under seal in Bankruptcy Court.

"There has been difficulty determining what, if any, assets the Christian Brothers have to pay claims," McKenna said. "We felt it was important to protect the rights of our clients to file this lawsuit right now."

Founded by Edmund Rice in Ireland in the early 19th century, the Congregation of Christian Brothers is often confused with the De La Salle Christian Brothers, who run Chicago's De La Salle Institute. They are not the same.

The Irish Christian Brothers, as the defendant is also often called, has run Brother Rice and St. Laurence since the mid 1900s. The order severed ties with Leo in 1992.

mbrachear@tribune.com

Twitter @TribSeeker

Copyright © 2013 Chicago Tribune Company, LLC

RELATED



Video: Chicago area men sue Congregation of Christian Brothers, allege abuse



MAPS

1001 South Pulaski Road,
Chicago, IL 60655, USA