

1-10-08 - Former priest reports to jail just before deadline
By Ann McGlynn, Quad-City Times (IA)

As a priest, James Janssen was known for wearing white instead of the customary black.

On Wednesday, the defrocked priest traded his white coat, white stocking cap, white shoes and light blue jeans for the orange jumpsuits of the Scott County Jail.

Janssen, 86, turned himself in at the jail to serve a 180-day sentence for contempt of court.

He was ordered Tuesday to go to jail after he failed to produce \$80,000 in missing savings bonds to be put toward a \$1.4 million civil judgment against him for sexually abusing his nephew, James Wells. In fact, the documents he did produce indicate even more bonds are not accounted for.

Janssen's attorney, Mike Tobey, said he is asking the Iowa Supreme Court to allow Janssen to be released from jail while it considers an appeal of the contempt charge.

Janssen, driven by a man who identified himself as a neighbor, arrived at 9:55 a.m., five minutes before the deadline ordered by Scott County District Judge Bobbi Alpers.

He carried a bag full of medications and \$20. As he stood waiting for a correctional officer to take him into the jail, he discussed getting a phone card so he could avoid collect-call fees, whether he would be able to read in jail and the care of his 83-year-old sister, Dorothy, with whom he lives.

Wells forgave his uncle years ago, Wells said Wednesday. The jail sentence serves justice more for his 95-year-old mother, James Janssen's sister, than for him, Wells said.

A trial, and therefore the \$1.4 million Janssen now owes to Wells, could have been avoided if Janssen would have admitted to abusing him, he said.

"My uncle is so disturbed emotionally and his narcissism so great he cannot admit wrongdoing," Wells said. "In his own mind, he's perfect."

Leaders from SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, think Janssen is the first member or former member of the clergy to be sent to jail in relation to a sex-abuse case.

While Alpers ordered Janssen to jail, District Judge Mary Howes, in a separate lawsuit filed by Wells against Dorothy Janssen, found she helped James Janssen hide his assets when he faced several civil lawsuits alleging sex abuse.

At issue was \$712,000 worth of savings bonds cashed by the Janssens, beginning the day after the Quad-City Times ran a story about the first lawsuit in May 2003.

Dorothy Janssen was ordered to pay Wells \$255,607 and turn over ownership of her home within 45 days and relinquish her car, \$102,500 in bonds and a \$10,000 Treasury Direct within 30 days. All are to go to Wells.

All told, the judgment is worth about \$550,000.

Scott County Sheriff Dennis Conard said James Janssen will go through a classification process to determine whether he will be a part of the general population or go to a specialized, more secure, unit. His medical needs also will be assessed.

Janssen is the oldest person in the Scott County Jail at this time, Conard said.

“He’ll be treated like anybody else,” he said.

Wells does not want any harm to come to Dorothy Janssen, he said.

“I hated to see her be suckered by my uncle,” he said.

Wells remains a practicing Catholic.

“My church has to reform,” he said of the way cases of sex abuse have been handled.
“They have to clean their act up.”