

5-20-08 - James Janssen case: Former priest faces 2nd contempt accusation
By Ann McGlynn, Quad-City Times (IA)

The attorneys for a man who won a \$1.4 million verdict against a defrocked, jailed Catholic priest are asking he be held in contempt of court for a second time or charged with perjury.

James Janssen lied on the stand in January during his first contempt of court hearing when he said he did not know the whereabouts of savings bonds, said Craig Levien, the attorney for James Wells, a nephew Janssen sexually abused. Janssen produced a list of one set of bonds to the court, then another set when he entered the Scott County Jail to serve a six-month sentence for contempt.

On Thursday, Janssen, 86, declined to answer questions during what is called a debtor's exam, except to acknowledge that the list is in his handwriting. He cited his right not to incriminate himself.

"He lied on his way into court, lied on his way out of court," Levien said of Janssen.

Scott County District Judge Bobbi Alpers will issue a written ruling on the matter.

Janssen shook during the hearing. He was brought into the courtroom in a wheelchair, wearing an orange jumpsuit. He did not testify.

His attorney, Mike Tobey, said there are things that Janssen may not remember. He also questioned whether Janssen is mentally competent and noted that he continues to have health problems.

Monday's court hearing is the continuation of a winding three-year-old battle to collect the judgment, which Wells won in May 2005.

The battle has resulted in two additional lawsuits, plus the contempt actions.

Wells sued his aunt, Dorothy Janssen, after he and his attorneys discovered that she and James Janssen, her brother, began cashing the bonds May 23, 2003, the day after a Quad-City Times article detailed the first of several lawsuits to be filed against the ex-priest alleging sexual abuse.

Cashing of the bonds continued through Oct. 17, 2003. All told, the principal and interest on the bonds totaled \$712,664.

Scott County District Judge Mary Howes ruled Wells was entitled to \$255,607 from Dorothy Janssen, as well as her house, car and more than \$112,500 in bonds and accounts in her name.

Wells has obtained title to the house and car. He is renting the house to Dorothy Janssen for two years, with the stipulation that James Janssen cannot stay there. Attorneys continue to work to resolve the judgment.

In April, Wells filed suit against five people who were given bonds, according to the list Janssen produced as he went to jail. They are Thomas Abel, David Wear, James Wilkinson, Jason Wilkinson and Christopher Bunce. One of the individuals on the list, retired priest Raymond Ruppenkamp, has returned the bonds. The bonds are scheduled to mature in June. However, a judge issued a temporary injunction preventing them from being cashed in.

Meanwhile, Janssen remains in jail until July on the first contempt of court charge. He was removed from the priesthood in 2004 by Pope John Paul II.

Believed to be the first-ever Davenport priest to be defrocked, Janssen was ordained in 1948. He held several positions in Clinton County. He also was pastor in Davenport, Burlington, East Pleasant Plain, Fort Madison, Holbrook and Newton. He was appointed Boy Scout chaplain. His last diocesan job in Grand Mound ended in 1990.

Janssen was a defendant in several civil suits alleging sex abuse, including the one filed by Wells. The others were dismissed after the victims reached settlements with the diocese.

All told, sex abuse cases in the Diocese of Davenport have cost the diocese and its insurer more than \$47 million. That amount includes a recent \$37 million settlement in the diocese's bankruptcy case and \$10 million paid to 45 victims before the diocese filed for bankruptcy in October 2006.