

June 18, 2007 - Memphis Diocese settles 3 sexual abuse lawsuits

By James Dowd, Commercial Appeal (TN)

Three civil lawsuits alleging sexual abuse by a former Memphis priest have been settled, but an investigation to determine his future in parish ministry is ongoing.

Last week the Catholic Diocese of Memphis reached financial settlements in three cases against Father Joseph Nguyen. The lawsuits, each filed in 2006 by three Vietnamese-American women listed as Jane Doe Nos. 1, 2 and 3, claimed multiple counts of sexual abuse by Nguyen from 1994 to 1999.

The alleged abuse occurred when the women were minors.

Exact amounts were not released, but on Sunday Adam Horowitz with the Miami-based law firm Herman & Mermelstein that represented the women said each complaint was settled for "in excess of \$100,000."

"The settlements validated the fact that Father Nguyen engaged in heinous acts and caused grave harm to our clients," Horowitz said. "The motivation to settle by our clients came at great human cost and they all realize this is not the end of the journey. There is a long road toward healing that they each face."

Before the first suit, Nguyen served as chaplain at St. Peter Villa. He had also served at several local parishes, including Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Germantown, St. Ann in Bartlett and St. Paul the Apostle in Memphis, and managed ministries within the Vietnamese Catholic community.

Nguyen was removed from his duties pending an investigation by the diocesan review board. While the diocesan investigation continues, Nguyen is not involved in any ministries and has no contact with children or any parishioners.

A statement from the diocese read in part, "The agreement notes that the settlement is neither an admission of liability or an admission of the validity of any claims made against the Diocese, but is, instead, a compromise of disputed claims.

"While this brings closure to the civil suits, the Diocese continues its investigation into the actions of Nguyen to determine whether or not he is suitable for ministry in the Church."