

NASHVILLE (TN)
International Herald Tribune
\$10 million child sex abuse suit names Catholic diocese in U.S.
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NASHVILLE, Tennessee A new \$10 million (?7.85 million) sex abuse lawsuit was filed Thursday against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville, claiming it failed to reveal allegations that a former priest currently serving a sentence for rape and molestation had abused other minors.

The plaintiff in the lawsuit, who is identified only as 29-year-old "John Doe", alleges former Nashville priest Ed McKeown began sexually abusing him at age 11 in 1988, a year before McKeown was forced out of the priesthood.

"At the time that John was abused by Father McKeown, John and/or his family were unaware that the diocese had previously received other allegations that Father McKeown sexually abused minors," according to the lawsuit.

Diocese spokesman Rick Musacchio said early Thursday that the diocese had not yet been served with the lawsuit. "It would be inappropriate to comment at this time," he said.

Last year, a settlement was reached in another lawsuit against the diocese brought by two 25-year-old men who claimed they had been molested by McKeown when they were children.

Both men, who said they were abused by McKeown between 1995 and 1999, argued that the diocese knew McKeown was a sexual predator and did not warn the community about the possible danger when he left the priesthood.

McKeown is serving a 25-year prison sentence for raping and molesting one of the men.

The case of the two men was unusual because McKeown had been forced to leave the priesthood years before their alleged abuse took place. Church officials said they were not accountable for the actions of someone who had left the diocese long before the abuse took place.

The plaintiff's attorney in the latest lawsuit alleges that the diocese knew McKeown was abusing children as early as the 1970s because the former priest admitted to a bishop that "he was a serial pedophile."

Because the diocese allegedly withheld that information, Miami attorney Jeff Herman said victims like his client and others are lawfully allowed to file cases years later on what's called "fraudulent concealment theories."

"The diocese knew that this priest was abusing children, covered it up and prevented these victims from knowing their legal rights," Herman said.

Mike Coode, who says he was abused by two priests in the early 1950s, said he has been trying for years to get information from the diocese.

"I want to make sure this doesn't happen to any more children," said the 66-year-old, who's considering filing a lawsuit.

Herman said he's been contacted by other alleged victims of McKeown and other priests from the diocese.

"This is the first of a wave of cases to hold the diocese accountable," the attorney said.
