

1-29-08 - Priest must pay in sex case

By BETTY ADAMS, Staff Writer, Kennebec Journal (ME)

AUGUSTA -- A superior court justice has ordered a Roman Catholic priest to pay \$4.2 million for allegedly sexually assaulting a boy in Augusta in the late 1980s. Justice Joseph Jabar ordered the Rev. Raymond Melville, who was most recently in Oklahoma and is no longer working as a priest, to pay \$3.2 million in compensatory damages and \$1 million in punitive damages to William J. Picher, 34, of Augusta.

Picher, through his attorney, Walter McKee, had accused Melville of sexual assault and battery and intentional infliction of emotional distress between Sept. 2, 1986, and June 9, 1988.

The civil lawsuit named Melville and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland as defendants.

Melville, who was served notice of the lawsuit while living in Lucien, Okla., never responded to the complaint.

In December 2007, Justice Donald H. Marden dismissed the claim against the bishop on the basis of charitable immunity. The order entered Thursday by Jabar held Melville liable for all the damages.

"The Diocese has escaped, for now, but we intend to appeal to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court," McKee said. "This judgment recognizes the undisputed horror that William Picher had to suffer at the hands of Raymond Melville."

McKee said he did not know what assets Melville had to pay the damages.

Picher claimed Melville befriended him first when Picher was 12 and attending St. Mary's School in Augusta. The friendship then turned into sexual abuse, Picher maintained.

Melville was ordained a priest in 1985 and assigned to St. Mary's the same year. In 1990, a Maryland man wrote to the bishop saying he was "emotionally, sexually and physically abused" as a teen by Melville, who was then a seminarian.

The bishop at the time sent Melville for counseling out of state. Afterward, Melville returned to Maine and served in parishes in Lewiston, Rumford and Machias.

He left the active ministry in 1997, according to published reports.

This is the second lawsuit alleging sexual assault and battery against Melville. In the other case, a default judgment of \$500,000 was issued against Melville and the Diocese paid an undisclosed sum.

Picher has another lawsuit pending against a number of Diocesan officials in their individual capacities.

"This is just round one," McKee said Monday.

The Diocese was represented by Gerald Petrucelli, who was out of state Monday and unavailable for comment.