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Dubuque bishop sued for all abusers' names

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Dubuque Archbishop Jerome Hanus has been named as a defendant in an unprecedented child sex abuse lawsuit brought by the family of a murdered Wisconsin man.

Hanus was among scores of Catholic bishops nationwide who were served with notice of the lawsuit last week.

The lawsuit, which seeks no monetary damages, was filed in August in St. Croix County Circuit Court, Wisconsin. It asks a state judge to force America's 194 Catholic bishops to disclose the names of roughly 5,000 proven, admitted and credibly accused abusive priests in the United States.

The suit is being brought by the family of Dan O'Connell of Wisconsin, who, along with a co-worker, was shot and killed in February 2002 by a suspected pedophile priest who also owned guns and pornography.

After a two-year police investigation, a judicial hearing determined that the crimes were committed by Father Ryan Erickson of the Diocese of Superior, Wis.

O'Connell had uncovered information about the priest molesting children. After police interrogated him about the murders, Erickson committed suicide in December 2004.

Further investigation revealed that Superior church officials had been aware of Erickson's erratic and questionable behavior and ordained him anyway.

The O'Connell family vowed to "make something good" come from the double murders and push for a five-point reform plan to prevent future abuse.

But in numerous attempts to work with the Catholic leaders the O'Connells said they found little support or response, so they filed the lawsuit.

The family said that after considerable research and meeting with experts and victims across the country, they believe church officials have made only minimal reforms and aren't abiding by their own policies on abuse.

They have created a Web site, <http://www.crusadeagainstclergyabuse.com>.
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