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Go

- Weather
- Random Acts of Kindness
- America at War
- Obituary listings
- Illinois Lottery

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- Tri-County Regional & State
- Nation & World
- America at War
- Obituary Lists
- Death Notices
- Police, fire, courts
- Local Updates
- Causes for Concern
- Road Construction
- Our Community
- Matters of Record
- Bankruptcies
- Births
- Building Permits
- Divorces
- DUI Dispositions
- Felony Dispositions
- Marriages

COLUMNISTS

- Phil Luciano
- Terry Bibo
- Statehouse Insider
- Hotline
- Word on the Street
- Sally McKee

GOVERNMENT

- Illinois links
- State contacts
- Federal links
- Federal contacts

FRONT PAGE

WEATHER

SPORTS

OPINION

BUSINESS

ENTERTAINMENT

Sexual abuse by priests lawsuit settled

Catholic Diocese of Peoria declined to comment on 14-count suit filed in February 2004

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

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BY ANDY KRAVETZ

OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA - A lawsuit alleging a former altar boy was sexually abused by three former priests was settled last month. Terms were not disclosed.

Details regarding the settlement of the 14-count suit, filed in Peoria County Circuit Court in February 2004, were few. An order in the court file states only the parties mutually sought to dismiss the case because of the settlement.

Officials with the Catholic Diocese of Peoria declined to comment.

Joseph Klest, a suburban Chicago attorney representing 37-year-old Daniel Koenigs, said he had agreed not to discuss specifics.

"The only thing I can say is that the matter has been resolved to everyone's satisfaction," Klest said Monday.

The suit graphically alleges nearly 30 separate acts of abuse perpetrated by the Revs. Francis Engels, William Harbert and Gregory Plunkett - who later became a priest - from 1980 to 1984 while Koenigs was an altar boy in churches in Woodlawn,

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All three priests were removed from the public ministry. Harbert died in April 2003.

The suit also alleged the abuse occurred on trips to Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin that Koenigs took with the three men.

Also named in the suit was the diocese itself. The suit alleges diocesan leaders knew about the priests' propensities to be "dangerous childhood sexual abusers" and left them in a position of authority. Koenigs claims Harbert and Engels told him that complaints had been made about them to Bishop Edward W. O'Rourke in the 1970s.

However, diocesan attorney Patricia Gibson said at the time the suit was filed that there was no record of anyone accusing the two of misconduct prior to 1993. Gibson was out of the office Monday.

Koenigs sought \$100,000 - the statutory requirement - on each count.

Koenigs said in 2004 that memories of the abuse were suppressed until 2002, when he was watching a television news story about sexual abuse in the Catholic church. In all, he believed the three men abused him more than 300 times.

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