

Aurora monastery faces suit over woman's alleged abuse

By Virginia Groark

Tribune staff reporter

A 42-year-old woman has filed a lawsuit against the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Aurora, claiming a brother who was once stationed at the Roman Catholic religious order molested her.

The lawsuit, filed in Kane County Circuit Court Tuesday, also names Brother Richard Kuhl as a defendant. The suit claims Kuhl sexually molested the girl from about 1974 until 1982. It seeks more than \$50,000 in damages.

The legal filing is the latest in a string of lawsuits against Kuhl, who was removed from active ministry more than five years ago and is living in a health-care facility in Pennsylvania, said Rev. Joseph Jablonski of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Some lawsuits were settled and others were dismissed, said Schaumburg attor-

ney Joseph Klest, who is representing the plaintiff in the suit filed Tuesday. Klest was involved in other sexual molestation lawsuits against Kuhl that date to the mid-1990s.

Klest said the plaintiff in this case, identified as Jane Doe 42, waited until now to sue Kuhl because she didn't remember the alleged abuse until recently.

"She ran into one of the other victims and they were talking about it and that's when she had the recollections of it," Klest said.

"I know it's hard for people to believe, but I've been handling these cases since the early 1990s, and it's true for almost everybody," he said, referring to a failure to recall abuse.

Jablonski, who was traveling and had not seen the lawsuits, could not comment on the details of the suit but said the religious order was upset by the allegations.

"We are very, very saddened

that any of our members may have been involved in any kind of improper behavior," he said.

According to the lawsuit, the plaintiff was a poverty-stricken girl who lived near the monastery when she met Kuhl, who allegedly began sexually abusing her around 1974. At the time, he was working as a teacher, spiritual adviser and missionary to local children, the suit states.

The lawsuit also claims that sometime before 1974, the mother of another neighborhood girl went to the monastery to report that Kuhl allegedly abused her daughter but nothing was done.

The suit charges that the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart failed to report sexual misconduct to authorities and failed to warn others in the area, including parents, about Kuhl. It also names the Catholic Diocese of Rockford as a defendant, for allegedly failing to report allegations of sexual abuse and concealing them from the public.