

Original URL: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/dec04/283424.asp>

Priest's extradition sought in abuse case

He is one of three clergymen accused in 20-year-old assaults

By MARIE ROHDE

mrohde@journal sentinel.com

Last Updated: Dec. 11, 2004

Milwaukee police are seeking the extradition of a 68-year-old Peoria, Ill., priest who has been charged in a warrant here with bringing an altar boy to Milwaukee more than 20 years ago and sexually assaulting him.

The priest, Francis Engels, has been held in the Henry County, Ill., jail since Tuesday on two felony counts of second degree sexual assault of a child that were issued by the Milwaukee County District Attorney's office. The priest is being held without bail and is scheduled to appear in court in Illinois on Monday morning.

The victim, Dan Koenigs, is now 37 and living in Chicago, according to his lawyer, Joe Klest, of Schaumburg, Ill.

Koenigs said he was molested many times between 1980 and 1985 by three priests, including Engels. Some of the abuse took place in Kentucky and Wisconsin, according to his lawyer. Koenigs was able to identify the Milwaukee motel where the abuse took place, Klest said.

Charges could not be brought in Illinois because the statute of limitations has lapsed, Klest said. The clock on the statute of limitations on the Wisconsin incidents stopped when Engels left Wisconsin, allowing the state to issue criminal charges.

In February, Koenigs filed a \$1 million civil lawsuit against the diocese in Peoria and the three priests whom he alleges assaulted him in the 1980s. He alleged that Peoria's late Bishop Edward O'Rourke knew that the priests were dangerous because another family had reported abuse in the 1970s, Klest said.

Church officials denied any knowledge of misconduct until 1993, when Engels was removed from public ministry, according to the diocesan Web site.

"The diocese is disappointed that Mr. Koenigs has chosen this unfortunate avenue to pursue this matter," according to a Web site story reporting the civil lawsuit. "The diocese has been in frequent contact with Mr. Koenigs since April 2002 with repeated offers to assist with counseling and is confused and saddened by his course of action."

In the church statement, Peoria Bishop Daniel Jenky did not fully acknowledge that the priests abused Koenigs but apologized for any abuse that may have occurred.

The civil lawsuit is scheduled to go to mediation in January, Klest said.

The other accused priests are William Harbert, who died in 2003, and Gregory Plunkett.

In a separate incident, Plunkett was charged in Illinois with fondling a 13-year-old boy in November 2003. In a non-jury trial, a judge there found him not guilty.

Klest said that while the two surviving men can no longer perform public ministry, it is unclear if they remain in the priesthood.

Appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Dec. 12, 2004.