

Another allegation of abuse, nonresponse

By John P. Martin
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

A 49-year-old postal carrier from Delaware County on Wednesday became the third man in a month to contend in a lawsuit that he was abused by a priest as a child and ignored by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as an adult victim.

Frank Finnegan's case faces unique hurdles: His allegation is four decades old, the priest died in 1996 and had never before been publicly accused, and Finnegan said he only recently had remembered the abuse.

However, the lawsuit, filed in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court, underscores the barrage of potentially costly civil battles the archdiocese could face after last month's grand jury report on clergy sex abuse.

Finnegan, of Collingdale, contends that he was abused in 1968 or 1969 by the Rev. John L. Kline, a former teacher at Roman Catholic High School who lived at the St. Francis Xavier parish rectory in Philadelphia. According to his lawsuit, Finnegan repressed memories of the assaults until about three years ago and only in recent weeks discovered that he "had been injured by the sexual contact" with Kline.

"I don't know why I didn't remember it" until then, Finnegan said. "I just know I didn't remember it."

He said he had notified the archdiocese three years ago that Kline assaulted him. He said he wanted church officials to publicly identify Kline as an abuser, but they did not.

Donna Farrell, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese, said it would have no comment on the allegations.

Kline, who taught music and art at Roman Catholic High School until retiring in

1981, was not mentioned in the two grand jury reports — the first in 2005 — outlining suspected abuse by Philadelphia-area priests and faulting the archdiocese's response.

Joined by his three children, wife, and sister, Finnegan and his lawyers announced the lawsuit on the steps of archdiocesan headquarters.

Finnegan said the attacks had occurred when the priest accompanied his family on vacations to Long Beach Island, N.J. He said Kline would come to his family's house for dinner every Thursday, and had celebrated holidays with the family.

"This man was considered family," Finnegan said, "and he betrayed us on a level that was hard to imagine."

He said he had decided to contact lawyer Marci Hamilton after hearing a radio interview in which she described a similar lawsuit she filed for another alleged victim. "She was literally telling my family story," Finnegan said.

His lawsuit is the third in a month filed by Hamilton and Dan Monahan. Each suit accuses the archdiocese and its leaders of fraud, concealment, and conspiracy and uses grand jury presentation as the foundation of its case.

Monahan said he and his partners had also fielded calls from prospective plaintiffs in Florida, Indiana, and California in recent weeks.

Hamilton said she was not worried about proving four-decade-old allegations against a priest long dead. She said she believed the archdiocese had corroborating evidence in the so-called secret archive files it kept on abusive priests.

"It has the secrets," she said.

Contact staff writer John P. Martin at 215-854-4774 or jmartin@phillynews.com.