Reginald Wright and Regina W. Ewell, both of Wilmington.

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SATURDAY
JUNE 7, 2008

The News Journal
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Another suit filed against DeLuca

'John Doe' case alleges sex abuse by priest

By BETH MILLER
The News Journal

Two new lawsuits were filed in Delaware Superior Court this week by men who say they were sexually abused by the Rev. Francis G. DeLuca when he was a priest at St. Elizabeth Church during the 1960s. Three DeLuca-related cases have been previously filed and attorneys say at least four more are coming.

One man filed anonymously Friday in Kent County, the second "John Doe" suit in as many weeks, alleging more than 100 acts of sexual abuse he says he suffered from 1966-69 when he was between 11 and 14 years old. In the suit, the 52-year-old New Castle County resident said DeLuca molested him to the point of physical injury while he was attending St. Elizabeth Church and its grade school.

The name of that plaintiff has been divulged to officials of the Diocese of Wilmington, who were not aware of his allegations until the suit was filed, according to diocese attorney Anthony Flynn. The diocese will honor the plaintiff's request to remain anonymous, Flynn said.

The other plaintiff – W-009 [redacted] 48, of Taberg, N.Y. – filed Wednesday in New Castle County, alleging hundreds of acts of sexual abuse from 1967 to 1974, when he was between the ages of 7 and 14. In the suit, W-009 said the abuses occurred during trips to Montreal, Canada, and New York City, in hotel rooms, in the church basement, in the W-009 home and backyard, and in DeLuca's car.

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Priest: More suits expected to be filed

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At one point, the suit alleges, DeLuca told W-009 that Jesus was gay and the priest's behavior with the boy was perfectly acceptable.

DeLuca, who retired to Syracuse in 1993 after 35 years of ministry, could not be reached for comment.

The priest, now 79, has been the focus of many lawsuits since 2006, when he was arrested in Syracuse, N.Y. He pleaded guilty to sexually abusing a teenage family member there and was sentenced to 60 days in jail.

Shortly after DeLuca's arrest, Bishop Michael Saltarelli released the names of 20 diocesan priests against whom the diocese had received credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors. Saltarelli also asked the Vatican to remove DeLuca's priestly faculties. The response to that request has not yet been received, said diocese spokesman Robert G. Krebs.

After Delaware passed the Child Victim's Act in 2007, others who said they had been victimized by DeLuca started to come forward. The 2007 law eliminated the civil statute of limitations in cases of child sexual abuse and granted a two-year "window," during which cases could be filed. That window closes in July 2009.

The first suit filed under the new law was brought by W-008 now of Florida, who said he was abused by DeLuca in the 1960s. Earlier this year, the diocese apologized to W-008 and settled out of court for an undisclosed sum. The teen DeLuca was convicted of abusing in Syracuse also has filed suit.

The suits allege that diocese officials knew DeLuca was molesting boys but continued to transfer him from parish to parish until 1993, when similar allegations arose again and then-Bishop Robert Mulvee allowed him to retire to Syracuse.

Attorney Thomas S. Neuberger, who represented W-008 represents both "John Doe" plaintiffs and expects to file three more DeLuca-related suits in the next three weeks.

DeLuca was not named as a defendant in either "John Doe" case, Neuberger said, because of negotiations under way with the diocese.

"If our negotiations fail we would add him as a defendant before the window closes in July of 2009," he said.

DeLuca is named in the W-009 suit, but attorney James Bailey, who represents W-009 declined to comment on the complaint.

"Because it's a sensitive case, I'm not sure any further comment by me is the right thing to do at this stage," Bailey said.

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