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Lawyer: 3 more friar abuse suits settled by former students

The Associated Press April 15, 2015 Updated 3 hours ago

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JOHNSTOWN, Pa. — Three more former students at a Catholic school have settled sexual abuse lawsuits involving a Franciscan friar who worked at the school nearly 20 years ago, their attorney said.

Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian said each of the cases settled for \$50,000, or a total of \$150,000, the (Johnstown) Tribune-Democrat (<http://bit.ly/1FK9zVv>) reported Wednesday.

In October, Garabedian and other attorneys announced an \$8 million settlement on behalf of 88 former Bishop McCort High School students alleging abuse by Brother Stephen Baker, who committed suicide more than two years ago. Those students each received between \$60,000 and slightly more than \$120,000.

Since the group settlement, other former students of the school in Johnstown, some 60 miles east of Pittsburgh, have come forward to sue the Altoona-Johnstown diocese and others. The diocese ran the school when Baker worked there.

Diocesan spokesman Tony DeGol declined to comment on the latest settlements saying, "As always, the diocese does not comment on matters that involve litigation."

The latest settlements involved men who were 14 to 17 when they were abused by Baker while attending the school from 1996 to 2000, Garabedian said.

Baker worked as an athletic trainer at the school from 1992 to 2001. He stabbed himself in the heart at his western Pennsylvania monastery in January 2013. That occurred nine days after the Youngstown, Ohio, diocese disclosed settlements with 11 former students who said they were abused by Baker at John F. Kennedy High School in Warren, Ohio, from 1986 to 1990.

News of the Ohio settlements prompted many of the Bishop McCort victims to come forward.

The school is no longer run by the diocese and is now headed by an independent board. But Garabedian said the school and Baker's religious community — the Province of the Immaculate Conception of the Third Order Regular Franciscans — were also involved in the three new settlements.

Matt Beynon, a spokesman for Bishop McCort, said the school "as it has been constituted as an organization since 2008, was not a party to or privy to the settlements."

Officials from the religious order didn't immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

Altoona attorney Richard Serbin, who represented 13 former students included in the October settlement, said he's also had three other newer claims by former students settle in recent months.

Garabedian continues to represent former students from the Youngstown school and another in Orchard Lake, Michigan, where Baker taught in the mid-1980s, in settlement talks about still more claims.

"It's been my experience that the amount of damage caused by pedophiles is ongoing," said Garabedian, who specializes in clergy sex abuse cases. "Victims continue to come forward, with no end in sight."

Information from: The Tribune-Democrat, <http://www.tribune-democrat.com>

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