

advocate for victims of clergy sex abuse says a recently uncovered letter shows the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland church knew for years about allegations against a parish priest but did nothing to protect potential young victims.

The letter mentions allegations against the Rev. James Vallely, who served in St. John's Parish in Bangor and was later transferred to St. Dominic's Parish in Portland and to St. Michael's Parish in South Berwick. He was working with a church in Florida when he was removed from active ministry following allegations of abuse. He has since died.

Robert Hoatson of the New Jersey victims advocacy group Road to Recovery held a news conference outside the Portland diocese Tuesday to call attention to the letter, which he said was one of the documents the church was compelled to release as part of a lawsuit brought by one of Vallely's victims. That suit alleged fraudulent concealment by the church and was recently settled. Hoatson said he could not provide more details about the case because the name of the victim in the suit, brought in Cumberland County, has not been made public.

The letter was written in 2005 by the Rev. Richard P. Rice and is addressed to "Marc," apparently Monsignor Marc B. Caron, Hoatson said. In it, Rice said that an article in the Maine Sunday Telegram had reminded him of a conversation he had around 1993 with the Rev. Dick Harvey in which Harvey said five boys had confided to him that they had been abused at St. John's.

The letter says that Harvey recalled telling Bishop Daniel Feeney about the allegations.

"Within a very brief time, Jim Vallely was transferred," the letter says. Feeney served as bishop from 1955 to 1969.

Hoatson said the existence of the letter indicates the church knew as early as 1956 that there were allegations of abuse against Vallely.

“Instead of the late Bishop Feeney removing Father James Vallely from priestly ministry and notifying the public, he transferred him to another parish where children were placed at risk of further sexual abuse by a serial pedophile priest,” Hoatson said.

Vallely, who was born in Sanford, served in parishes in many Maine communities starting in 1952. He was ordained in Massachusetts in 1949 and retired in 1988 because of illness. He died on Dec. 12, 1997, at the age of 75 at his winter home in Sun City, Florida.

Attorney Mitchell Garabedian of Boston, known nationally as an advocate for victims in Boston’s clergy sex abuse scandal, has said he represented nine people who say they were abused by Vallely over the years, from about 1958 to 1979. He said during an interview in 2013 that the church was told in 1978 that Vallely was assaulting children, but did not respond appropriately.

The letter indicates the church knew even earlier than 1978, and Garabedian says that disclosure opens the door to lawsuits by victims who previously were shut out by Maine’s statute of limitations.

Although the 1970s-era statute of limitations to sue has expired, Garabedian has made a legal claim that the diocese fraudulently concealed knowledge of abuse accusations against Vallely. This should reset the statute of limitations and allow lawsuits to proceed.

Bishop Robert P. Deeley released a statement Tuesday that said in part: “The Diocese of Portland respects the privacy and confidentiality of the victim/survivors involved in cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics. We maintain that privacy and confidentiality even if an individual or their legal representation chooses to discuss their situation publicly.”

“As I said at the annual Day of Prayer and Penance in Portland on Feb. 27, mistakes were made in the past and the failure to deal with this problem in a more forthright manner gravely harmed those who were abused. We do not want to forget. Remembering keeps us vigilant in

our effort to reform. We cannot change the past, but we can do everything possible to see that history does not repeat itself.”

The statement encouraged anyone with information about sexual abuse of a minor by a church representative to contact police and Michael Magalski, director of the Office of Professional Responsibility for the Diocese of Portland, at (207) 321-7836 or atmichael.magalski@portlanddiocese.org.

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