

Archdiocese of Hartford sued for alleged sexual abuse by former Guilford priest

Former altar boy files lawsuit against Archdiocese of Hartford

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The Archdiocese of Hartford has been sued by a former altar boy, claiming he was sexually abused by a priest who served three parishes in Greater New Haven.

The Rev. Daniel McSheffery has been accused of abusing the man, now 49 years old, between 1977 and 1982 when McSheffery was pastor of St. George Roman Catholic Church in Guilford.

McSheffery was ordained in 1956 and also served at St. Mary Church in Branford, St. Augustine Church in North Branford and St. Augustine Church and its school in Hartford, according to the lawsuit filed by attorney Thomas McNamara of **McNamara and Goodman** in New Haven. McSheffery died in 2014, according to Maria Zone, spokeswoman for the archdiocese, who said church officials would have no other comment on pending litigation.

"McSheffery was one of Connecticut's most cunning and deceitful child sexual abusers ever to wear a Roman collar," McNamara said. "Parishioners hung on his every word and he used his charisma to inflict lifelong harm on the most defenseless in the St. George community."

The spiritual leader of the archdiocese during the time of McSheffery's alleged abuse was the late Archbishop John F. Whealon.

According to the lawsuit, the alleged victim's mother raised him as a devout Catholic, and encouraged him to become an altar boy.

"The plaintiff was taught to believe, and did believe, that a Roman Catholic priest should be respected and obeyed without question as he was the ultimate authority in moral and spiritual matters and that he should follow a priest's instructions to the letter," the complaint states.

It claims the alleged victim sought pastoral counseling from McSheffery, and that "the plaintiff grew to be emotionally dependent" on him. From age 9 to age 14, the plaintiff allegedly was abused about 250 times, according to the lawsuit. The alleged abuse took place in the St. George rectory, on the church altar, in McSheffery's car and in his Old Saybrook cottage and in the plaintiff's home. The priest allegedly provided alcohol to the plaintiff, the suit states.

According to the complaint, McSheffery would assure the boy that "you're in charge" and told him, "What we're doing is okay, there's nothing to be ashamed of, and no one would believe you anyway. It's our secret."

The suit claims that the archdiocese had a duty to act "on behalf of the plaintiff's interests as to his well-being and emotional state and to be sure that he was free from any harm that would be caused" by McSheffery. It states that Whealon and others were told the priest was a danger to children but "chose not to disclose this information to its parishioners and those who would have contact with [McSheffery]."

According to the complaint, "The defendant actually kept all records of this reported sexual abuse in what is referred to as the 'Secret Archives,' also known as [McSheffery's] '379 File' or '489 File.'" That file was kept separate from the priest's employment file, "under lock and key, and can only be accessed by the Archbishop and the Chancellor of the Archdiocese," the lawsuit states.

McNamara said he has filed suit regarding McSheffery several times, all of which were settled before trial. "Wherever he was, he was this big, tall figure," McNamara said of McSheffery. "He had the gift of gab and education. He was very social with everybody and that was his cover."

McNamara said the alleged victim came forward after the statute of limitations, which ends on a plaintiff's 48th birthday, had run out. But he said that should not apply, because McSheffery had a fiduciary relationship with the alleged victim, and that a prior case, *Martinelli v. Diocese of Bridgeport*, established that the statute of limitations would not apply when such a relationship existed.

McSheffery's relationship with the plaintiff was "more than just the priest-parishioner [role]. The priest was this kid's counselor, adviser, pastoral counselor," McNamara said. "If there was a fiduciary relationship, the archdiocese had a duty to warn the

parishioners. There should not be a statute of limitations. Connecticut has recognized that people don't talk about this until later in life for various reasons."

McSheffery, then 71 and serving at St. Augustine in North Branford, was put on leave by the archdiocese in 2002 and investigated for sexual misconduct, according to New Haven Register reports. The Register reported that eight men sued, claiming McSheffery had abused them while he served in Hartford, North Branford and Guilford.

The archdiocese settled cases involving 14 priests, including McSheffery, in 2005 for \$22 million.

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