

Clergy child sex abuse allegations arise

Damien Memorial School and St. Anthony are hit with accusations of molestation

[By Rob Perez](#)

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Twelve former students at Damien high school on Oahu have filed claims in a New York bankruptcy court alleging that they were sexually abused by clergy who were working at the private Catholic school in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

The allegations were disclosed Thursday by a California attorney who is representing the alleged victims in their claims against the North American branch of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, which runs Catholic schools around the country and supplies some staff to what is now called Damien Memorial School.



**Joseph
Ferrario:**

The late bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Honolulu is named in a lawsuit alleging the abuse of several former Damien high school students

Michael Reck of the law firm Jeff Anderson & Associates said officials overseeing the school during that period were aware of the abuse problem but covered it up for years.

"It's really a conspiracy of silence and abuse that's most troubling," Reck said.

The North American branch of the congregation filed for bankruptcy protection in April 2011 amid mounting sexual abuse claims against U.S. and Canadian members. The court set a deadline of Aug. 1 this year for claims.

Pat Bigold, a Damien spokes-man, said school President Bernard Ho, who took office in 2007, has received no information about the allegations and therefore could not comment. Damien is run by the Congregation of Christian Brothers of Hawaii, an independent corporation, and is not part of the bankruptcy filing, Bigold said.

The sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Roman Catholic Church nationally for more than a decade drew renewed attention in Hawaii on Thursday when a former Kailua resident held a news conference to speak publicly for the first time about what he said were repeated sexual assaults in the 1970s by two priests at St. Anthony Church in Kailua.

HAWAII NEWSNOW VIDEO »
[2 Kailua priests accused of rape](#)

Mark Pinkosh, 48, who now lives in Los Angeles, told reporters he initially was raped by the Rev. Joseph Henry when he was 8 or 9 and, when he reported the assaults to other clergy, was instructed not to tell anyone else about what happened. The assaults continued, Pinkosh said, and he eventually confided in another priest, the Rev. Joseph Ferrario, who had been assigned to St. Anthony's. But Ferrario repeatedly molested him as well, Pinkosh added.

Henry and Ferrario, who later became bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu, have since died.

Pinkosh in June filed a lawsuit against the diocese and other defendants but kept his identity confidential, filing as "John Roe 2." He said he decided to go public to encourage other victims of clergy abuse in Hawaii to come forward now that a new law gives them a two-year window to file lawsuits no matter when the assaults happened.

"I know there are dozens or maybe even hundreds of other people out there who went through exactly the same thing," Pinkosh told reporters.

Patrick Downes, a diocese spokes-man, said he could not comment on the Pinkosh lawsuit and another one filed in May by one of the former Damien students because the church has not been served yet with either complaint.

Until the new law was signed by Gov. Neil Abercrombie in April, people who suffered abuses decades ago but kept quiet about what happened generally have had no legal recourse because the statute of limitations had lapsed. The new law gives alleged victims until April 2014 to file suit.

That law prompted the former Damien students to come forward, according to Reck, though only one has actually filed a lawsuit so far. The other 11 are expected to file suits within the next several months, Reck added.

All 12 have filed confidential claims in the bankruptcy case under the Aug. 1 deadline. The allegations date as far back as 1968 and as recently as the late 1980s, and the victims identified about six perpetrators who were priests or religious brothers at Damien, in various capacities, according to Reck.

He said the victims ranged in age from 13 to 17. The youngest wasn't a high school student, but attended a summer program at Damien, Reck said.

In the only claim of the 12 that has been made public, the alleged victim — his identity is redacted — said he was sexually molested as a 10th-grader by the Rev. George DeCosta during an overnight camping trip. According to the claim, DeCosta gave the victim alcohol and forced him to go swimming in the nude. The 10th-grader became incapacitated and awoke to discover DeCosta fondling him, the claim says. The youth also was forced to masturbate the priest, according to the claim.

Attempts to contact DeCosta, who lives on Hawaii island, were unsuccessful Thursday. But in a Wednesday article in the Hawaii Tribune-Herald, he denied the allegations.

In a May lawsuit, another of the 12 former Damien students — this one is identified as "John Roe 1" — alleged that he was molested as a 13-year-old in the early 1980s by the Rev. Gerald Funcheon, who was the student's teacher and counselor at Damien, during an off-campus trip. The lawsuit, also filed by the Anderson law firm, said the defendants, including Damien, knew or should have known that Funcheon was a child molester but concealed that from students and their parents.

Funcheon could not be reached for comment.

Bigold said the school could not comment on the Funcheon allegations because it has not been served with the complaint.

He said the Christian Brothers has three people working at the school: the principal, a teacher and a counselor. None was at Damien during the period of the alleged abuses, Bigold said.