

Priest countersues for \$1 billion

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NEW ORLEANS (AP) — One of four priests being sued for \$17.1 million for alleged sexual abuse filed a \$1 billion suit Tuesday against his accusers.

The Rev. Joseph Chotin, pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Church in Mandeville, said he sued to counter the "unwarranted slanderous attack" on him by a 19-year-old Mandeville man and his parents, and to stop such future action against innocent people like himself.

"While I admit I am imperfect, I categorically deny here at the altar of God the allegations made against me in this lawsuit," he said in a prepared statement.

Chotin said he would donate any money he might receive to the Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans. He said his lawyer also would charge no fee.

"I do not bring this countersuit for monetary gain," Chotin said, "but, in an effort not only to prove that I am not guilty of the charges made, but also that maybe by my actions it will act as a deterrent that others may not be so defamed without basis in fact."

Chotin's suit in Orleans Parish Civil District Court is in response to a \$17.1 million suit filed last week in the same court.

The suit against Chotin does not identify the plaintiffs. They are identified only as John Doe, the alleged victim, and his parents, James and Mary Doe. Chotin named those three as defendants, plus their attorneys, Burton Klein, Donald Klein and Raul Bencomo.

The initial suit accused the Rev. James Kilgour of seducing Doe when Doe was a 13-year-old student at Our Lady of the Lake School. Kilgour was a teacher and Doe's counselor at Our Lady of the Lake, the suit said.

The suit also accused Chotin, the Rev. Charles Fendin of St. Anselm Church in Madisonville and the Rev. Vince Feehan, a former St. Anselm pastor, of encouraging the boy in homosexual behavior.

The sole accusation against Chotin was that he allegedly showed homosexual pornographic movies to the former altar boy and Kilgour.

A St. Tammany Parish grand jury investigated a similar accusation against Chotin during an investigation of Our Lady of the Lake School last summer. The panel took no action.

A priest for 23 years and a pastor at Our Lady of the Lake for the past eight, Chotin said the suit has damaged his reputation.

Chotin's suit said he was not aware of any claims against him until the Does and their attorneys demanded \$1.5 million from the Archdiocese of New Orleans about two months ago.

Chotin contends the plaintiffs' allegations charges were made with malice and for the ulterior purpose of gaining money.

Klein said he could not comment on Chotin's suit because he has not seen it.

"I can only assume it is an effort to intimidate lawyers from filing suits of this nature," he said. "We intend to prosecute our (clients') claim fully."

Archbishop Philip M. Hannan said that he was aware of the counterclaim countersuit and supports the priest.



AP Photo

No strike

Members of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants celebrate the news at APFA headquarters in Euless, Texas, Tuesday night that a pending strike had been canceled just hours before the 12:01 a.m. deadline. Co-strike coordinators Kaye Preston, center, Suzette Ahrendt, right, and picket coordinator Deborah Seale appear pleased.

Families complain of delays

Copter crash toll is 15

LAFAYETTE (AP) — Some relatives complained Tuesday of unnecessary delays in the aftermath of a helicopter crash which killed 15 men being flown to an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

Fourteen of the men — 12 Penrod Drilling Co. employees and the helicopter's two pilots — died instantly Monday when the aircraft crashed, exploded and burned while landing on the rig, known as Penrod 83, about 120 miles south of New Orleans.

The lone survivor of the crash, another Penrod employee, suffered burns over 95 percent of his body and died Tuesday in a suburban New Orleans hospital.

The 12 Penrod employees were a replacement crew intending to work the rig through the Christmas holidays. Both pilots were described as experienced Petroleum Helicopters Inc. veterans.

The accident's cause was not immediately known, but the Coast Guard said there would be an investigation by its Marine Safety Office, the Federal Aviation Administration

and National Transportation Safety Board.

As the bodies were flown Tuesday to Lafayette, federal investigators were photographing and examining the helicopter's charred wreckage.

Some relatives also complained about difficulty in getting information from Penrod and also about the delay in returning the remains to the mainland.

The bodies originally were to have been flown Monday night to the Vermillion Parish morgue at Abbeville, but fog shrouded the area and the remains were flown instead Tuesday to Lafayette, where Penrod arranged motel rooms for most of the families.

"If the weather is so bad that they can't bring them out, why were they flown in the first place?" asked Cathyn Sam, whose father died in the crash.

Winds at the time were from the northeast at about 15 miles an hour, seas were two to three feet and fog limited visibility from a quarter-mile to a mile, the Coast Guard said.

Rig worker Dabney Forestall said the helicopter circled the rig, apparently hit a leg protruding from the structure, fell onto the heliport, exploded and burned.

The lone survivor, Anthony Fann, 23, of Destrehan, was hurled from the helicopter but died about 24 hours later at West Jefferson Medical Center in suburban New Orleans. Hospital spokeswoman Beth Dutcher said Fann suffered third degree burns over 95 percent of his body.

The 14 aboard the helicopter were burned so badly that dental records had to be used to make positive identification.

"The real story is these men died for their country, a country that depends on its oil, and they died at Christmas," said Richard Dogget, whose nephew, Ulmer "Bubba" Palmer, also died on the rig.

The dead PHI employees were identified as Frederick T. Wibbelsman, 48, the pilot from Austin, Texas, and co-pilot Richard Leroy Wagner, 38, of Lafayette. Wibbelsman had worked at PHI for 23 years, Wagner for 10 years, officials said.

Penrod spokesman David Viviano identified the dead Penrod employees from Louisiana as John B. Hollier and Louis J. Quick Jr., both of Abbeville; Brian Glen Davis of Alexandria, Sam Alfred Jr. of Fardoche, Johnny R. Blackwell of Olla, Allen G. McCullough of Forest Hill and Glen J. Price Sr. of Lake Arthur.