

Published July 20 2010

Sawyer County will investigate former priest

The Sawyer County Sheriff's Department is investigating allegations that a former Superior Diocese priest stationed at a Winter, Wis., church sexually assaulted two boys in the early 1980s.

By: [Brandon Stahl](#), Duluth News Tribune

- [Tom Ericksen](#)



The ruling could affect a decision by Sawyer County prosecutors whether to charge former priest Tom Ericksen, who acknowledged on Monday that he fondled three boys in the early 1980s while assigned by the Superior Diocese to Winter, Wis. (MySpace photo)

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The Sawyer County Sheriff's Department is investigating allegations that a former Superior Diocese priest stationed at a Winter, Wis., church sexually assaulted two boys in the early 1980s.

One of the alleged victims, Paul Eck, said he was contacted on Friday by a Sawyer County sheriff's investigator who told him he would begin interviewing him and his nephew, James, who also claims he was sexually assaulted by the Rev. Tom Ericksen, as the News Tribune first reported in June.

Sawyer County Sheriff James Meier said he would not comment on the investigation, except to say "one of our investigators was assigned to the case and we have an open complaint."

Also, the Associated Press reported on Monday that Ericksen admitted that he "fondled" three boys but denied having contact with a fourth. The news agency did not say if the Ecks were among that group and said Ericksen claimed he hasn't abused any children since leaving the priesthood 22 years ago.

Ericksen and the Superior Diocese settled with the Ecks for nearly \$3 million in 1989. Paul Eck said he was 17 when Ericksen raped him; James Eck said he was either 8 or 9 when Ericksen molested him at least a dozen times, court records show.

The Ecks brought their charges forward to prosecutors last month in hopes of preventing what they say might be more abuse.

“We’re hoping that if we make enough noise, others will step forward,” said Paul.

Ericksen left Winter in 1983, shortly after the alleged abuse, and moved to Minneapolis before moving to Kansas City, according to biographies he posted online.

If that information is correct, Ericksen may still be prosecuted in Wisconsin for the long-ago allegations under a “tolling” provision, which stops the clock on the statute of limitations if the alleged offender moves to another state.

Ericksen was removed from the priesthood in 1988. He told the News Tribune on Monday that the 1989 lawsuit included the bishops as defendants “because they knew I had problems and they still moved me around.” He declined further comment, but earlier told the newspaper: “I thought it was all settled. ... It was 30 years ago, for Pete’s sake.”

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests called a press conference in Kansas City to draw attention to his case and let residents know that a former priest accused of child abuse is living there.

“We would like the diocese to put his name and whereabouts along with other credibly accused priests on their Web site,” said SNAP national director David Clohessy.

Eck said the Sawyer County investigator Gary Gillis told him he would also interview former Superior Bishop Raphael Fliss, work to obtain records from the diocese, and try to find other potential witnesses.

Fliss previously denied remembering Ericksen’s settlement or allegations of abuse.

In a statement released last month, current Superior Bishop Peter Christiansen he had “no personal knowledge of the events that took place 20 years ago. I also have no current information concerning (Ericksen).”

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