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Ananova :

Racketeering suit brought alleging Catholic church cover-up of abuse

US Catholic Bishops face a lawsuit accusing them of racketeering by covering up claims of sexual abuse.

The suit was filed by a man who says he was molested at a Missouri seminary in the 1980s.

It cites the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations Act, which includes provisions for civil cases when someone is harmed by a "pattern" of illegal activity.

The suit was filed in Hannibal, Missouri, site of St Thomas Aquinas Seminary. It names former West Palm Beach Bishop Anthony O'Connell, along with all US Bishops.

"In this case, we have the Catholic Church and the seminary that have been infiltrated by predators who prey on children, and they cover it up," attorney Patrick Noaker said.

The law has been used in at least two other church abuse cases, but not successfully.

Mr Noaker alleged that bishops maintain secret files concerning priests accused of sexual misconduct. Often, he said, priests are

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sent to other states to make extradition difficult.

"What we have is evidence that the Catholic Church has aided in obstructing and hiding this information from law enforcement agencies," Mr Noaker said.

Officials with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declined to comment.

O'Connell resigned as bishop in West Palm Beach on March 8 after admitting he sexually abused Christopher Dixon, 40, who was a seminarian at St. Thomas in the late 1970s. O'Connell has been in seclusion since then.

Story filed: 01:05 Saturday 23rd March 2002

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