Accused priest subject of earlier complaint

LAFAYETTE (AP) — Church officials were confronted more than 30 years ago with allegations of child sex abuse by a Catholic priest who was not removed from duty until other victims threatened to sue last summer, a newspaper reported Thursday.

Brenda Andrepont Gossett of Lake Charles told the weekly Times of Acadiana that she was molested in 1952 by the Rev. John Engbers, who is named in a $50 million suit against the church filed by five sisters who say they were each molested for several years.

Engbers, a 63-year-old native of Holland, is among three priests from the Diocese of Lafayette accused of child molesting in suits filed by alleged victims. Church officials have refused to comment on any of the cases.

Gossett, 36, told reporter Jason Berry in a copyrighted article that she told her mother of Engbers’ acts when she was 3 years old. Her mother, Haddie Andrepont, said she and her husband met with Engbers and Msgr. George Bodin to discuss the matter.

“My husband wanted him shipped back to Holland, but Msgr. Bodin told us they were going to send him to an institution for treatment,” Andrepont said.

Bodin told the newspaper he did not recall that meeting, but confirmed that there were allegations against Engbers at the time.

“Someone complained about him once, which I reported to the dean (head of priests). That was Msgr. Boudreaux. He is deceased.”

The five sisters who filed suit against Engbers last week said they were each abused in turn for several years beginning in 1957. They told the Times that they filed suit because they were angry with church officials for not removing him immediately when they came forward with their allegations last December.

Engbers was removed from his post as pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Leroy in July, and reportedly has returned to Holland.

The suit claims Engbers told the girls they were “part of an experiment ordered by God Himself to teach Father Engbers about love so that he would know how to deal with adults that came to him for advice as a priest.”

The priest sex scandal broke in 1983, when the first suits were filed against the Rev. Gilbert Gauthe, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison last month after confessing that he molested about three dozen altar boys.

Named in another suit is Lane Fontenot, who was suspended as priest in 1983 for sexually abusing a young boy.

Bishop Gerard Frey testified in a deposition taken for the Gauthe trial that church officials were confronted with allegations of homosexuality against Gauthe 10 years earlier, but allowed him to return to duty after counseling.

The church has admitted liability in the suits filed by about 22 of Gauthe’s victims. About half of those suits have been settled out of court, reportedly for $500,000 each.