



## KREM Local News

# Men **allege past abuse** at Morning Star Boys Ranch

04:37 PM PST on Friday, February 15, 2008

By KEVIN BLOCKER;KREM.com

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And after a Friday morning court hearing, the plaintiff's attorney offered scathing words for the way he believes Wietensteiner ran the boys ranch during his tenure.



### KREM 2 News

"It was a McDonald's drive-thru for pedophiles," said Tim Kosnoff when reached at his home office Friday afternoon. This latest lawsuit brings the total number of plaintiffs who have filed claims against the boys ranch to 16, he said.

The attorney for the defendants, Jim King, called King's statement "outrageous."

The newest plaintiffs are 39, 48 and 55 respectively. According to the lawsuit, the sexual abuse happened during the 1960's, 70's and 80's at the hands of Father Weitensteiner, Father Patrick O'Donnell and another employee. The lawsuit accuses Morning Star of negligent supervision and knowingly allowing employees to sexually abuse residents.

Weitensteiner resigned as head of the boys ranch in 2006 amid several other allegations of abuse. Morning Star is operated by the Spokane Catholic Diocese.

Kosnoff, based in Issaquah, is representing the plaintiffs identified only as "M.G.", "B.M." and "J.R." in court documents.

King faxed KREM 2 NEWS copies of letters from B.M. that he claims were sent to Wietensteiner in recent years in which he thanks the Father for his time at the boys ranch.

" 'None of us ever experienced abuse there,' " said King, reading from the letter.

For his part, King also filed a response in Spokane County Superior Court alleging that current and past plaintiffs were trouble makers to begin with and have no credibility.

Kosnoff provided KREM 2 NEWS with notes from a June 13, 2007 deposition in which King stated: "I leave my grandkids with Father Weitensteiner without a moments worry," Kosnoff said in his phone interview with KREM.

Kosnoff countered by saying that King is in a perpetual state of denial about Wietensteiner. "His loyalty to Father Joe is clouding his judgement."

Kosnoff characterized the lives of most of the victims as being: "really a dark, dark picture."

Anger, depression and anxiety disorders are just a few of many symptoms that sexual abuse victims at the boys ranch have suffered from.

"They were unlike victims of the clergy sex scandals because at the end of the day they weren't middle-class kids going home to their parents. The boys ranch was their home," he said.



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**Suit claims teens suffered abuse at Boys Ranch**

Posted: Feb 15, 2008 03:51 PM PST  
 Updated: Feb 15, 2008 09:24 PM PST

SPOKANE - Three men have filed a lawsuit against the Morning Star Boys Ranch claiming they were physically abused during their stays at the ranch.



In the suit filed Friday in Spokane County Court, one of the plaintiffs claims he lived at the ranch between 1983 and 1984 and during that time alleges he was sexually abused by Father Joe Weitensteiner. A second plaintiff also alleged he was abused by Father Joe Weitensteiner during his stay between 1962 and 1966.

The third plaintiff says that he was abused while living at the ranch between 1973 and 1975 by Father Patrick O'Donnell, who in a series of depositions last year admitted he sexually abused teenage boys while serving as a parish priest for the Spokane Diocese.

- Also See:
- ▶ **New abuse suit filed against Morning Star**
  - ▶ **Morning Star faced abuse lawsuit in 2005**

Story by:  
 ▶ **Rob Kauder / Internet Content Manager, KXLY.com**

O'Donnell, it was recently uncovered, is living in a gated community in La Conner, Washington. He left the priesthood in the mid 1980s and was listed as one of the defendants in the lawsuit against the Spokane Diocese that resulted in the diocese's bankruptcy and multi-million dollar payout to plaintiffs.

In sworn depositions **O'Donnell admitted to molesting dozens of boys**. Because the incidents were never reported to authorities he was never charged with a crime.

Father Joseph Weitensteiner, the long-time administrator of Morning Star Boys Ranch, served at the Ranch from 1966 through his retirement in May of 2006. In 2005 he was accused of abuse of two boys who lived at the Ranch in the 1970s and 1980s.

Morning Star spokeswoman Jenn Kantz said the ranch strongly supports Weitensteiner.

"He dedicated 50 years of his life to serving 1,300 boys," she said. "He has made a profound impact on Spokane and the Inland Northwest."

The lawsuit filed Friday claims the Ranch "negligently supervised" its staff members and that the staff shirked their responsibilities to report child abuse, breaching "both a statutorily proscribed duty and a duty of reasonable care" for the boys staying at the Ranch committed by members and volunteers on the staff.

In their request for relief the three plaintiffs asked for special damages for medical expenses, lost earnings and for general damages for physical, mental and emotional injury from their reported abuse while staying at the Ranch.

"There was not only sexual abuse," says Steven Reich, the attorney representing the plaintiffs, "but physical abuse, emotional abuse,

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Reich believes the men are just some of the men abused over the decades as boys.

Kantz stated on Friday that the ranch has improved safety and protection for the boys living there, and is moving forward.

***KXLY4's John Langelier contributed to this report.***



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SPOKANE

## 3 more allege abuse at Morning Star

By Alison Boggs  
Staff writer  
February 16, 2008

Three more men sued Morning Star Boys' Ranch today, including two men who allege that the ranch's former director sexually abused them in the 1960s and 1980s.

The third man alleges sexual abuse when he lived at the Catholic boys' home south of Spokane in the 1970s by admitted pedophile the Rev. Patrick O'Donnell and by an unnamed ranch volunteer, according to the lawsuit filed in Spokane County Superior Court.

This brings to eight the number of plaintiffs alleging abuse by the ranch's revered former director, the Rev. Joseph Weitensteiner, and to 16 the number alleging abuse at the ranch in legal filings that began in August 2005.

Seattle attorney Timothy Kosnoff said today's lawsuit is noteworthy because Weitensteiner is singled out as a defendant for the first time.

"We're seeking to amend previous filings to include him now as an individual defendant in addition to the ranch," Kosnoff said. "He now has been credibly accused by so many people. The evidence is mounting and it's so overwhelming that we think it's necessary."

However, Jim King, an attorney for Morning Star, said that Weitensteiner has voluntarily taken and passed "with flying colors" a polygraph test about the alleged sexual abuse. He said the priest's 50-year record of service is impeccable, while questioning the credibility of the plaintiffs.

"Did he (Kosnoff) tell you how many of his clients are felons?" King asked. "We intend to try the cases and let a jury decide on the credibility of Father Weitensteiner. These cases are going to involve the credibility of the accuser and the accused."

In the latest filing, the three men, ages 39, 48 and 55, are identified only by their initials. One man, "M.G." alleges abuse when he lived at the ranch from 1983-84; "B.M.," when he lived at the ranch from 1973-75 and "J.R.," when he lived at the ranch from 1962-66, the complaint says.

A Morning Star spokeswoman said most of the ranch's residents have spent their "safest years" there. In its 50-year history, the ranch has served more than 1,300 boys with behavioral problems, many of whom had been involved with the state's juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Private citizens and the state "continue to place boys in our care to this day," said spokeswoman Jenn Kantz.

"The ranch is shocked, once again. It's always a shock," Kantz said. "We're committed to setting the record straight. Today, Morning Star Boys' Ranch is a safe and therapeutic place."

Through Kantz, Weitensteiner declined a request for an interview. He has strenuously denied past allegations. Weitensteiner said in 2005 that he had "never been sexually inappropriate with any child at any time."

O'Donnell, however, has admitted molesting dozens of boys. Confidentiality issues make it unclear whether any of them were Morning Star residents. He is named in 66 of the 176 claims filed alleging sexual abuse by priests in the Spokane Catholic Diocese, more than any other single priest. The diocese names him on its Web site as one of the priests it considers "credibly accused." O'Donnell said in a 2004 deposition that he conducted "evaluations" at the ranch and that he took boys from the Spokane Diocese to Morning Star to play basketball. He also said that in the early to mid-1980s, Bishop Lawrence Welsh instructed him to stop consulting with Morning Star, past news reports said.

The lawsuit alleges that Morning Star permitted abusers to enter the ranch and "remove boys and sexually molest them." It also alleges violations of state law that required the ranch and its staff to report all incidents of child abuse.

Kantz said Morning Star strictly enforces state licensing requirements that employees pass stringent background checks before they are able to supervise residents. Volunteers must also pass background checks, she said, adding that some of the background-check laws date back to the 1970s.

Weitensteiner retired from the ranch in 2006, announcing it in a news release that included a statement from Spokane Bishop William Skylstad, who said he was "profoundly grateful" for the priest's service.

Contact Alison Boggs at (509) 459-5484 or by e-mail at [alisonb@spokesman.com](mailto:alisonb@spokesman.com).

**Document:** [Summons and complaint for damages](#)  
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