

Abuse at St Stanislaus College "Involved Night Orgies"

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ORGIES involving up to 60 schoolboys, priests and teachers are among allegations levelled at former staff members of a NSW Catholic boarding school.

The Seven Network last night reported claims that nine former teachers and priests from St Stanislaus College in Bathurst, in eastern NSW, had committed sexual abuse on students during "hypnotic" night prayer services in the 1980s.

An alleged victim, whose identity was withheld for legal reasons, said the number of victims involved in the encounters had grown over time.

"It started out on a one-on-one basis and then in small groups of between eight and 12, and then on one occasion there was a large group of at least 60."

St Stanislaus headmaster John Edwards yesterday said he was served with a search warrant last month that named three former staff.

"There were three former staff members who were listed on the search warrant, but only one of them had the word 'accused' next to their name," MrEdwards said.

The accused is a 65-year-old former Catholic priest who served at the school and now faces 33 charges relating to sexual assault and gross acts of indecency on juveniles aged between 10 and 18.

Detective Superintendent Michael Goodwin of Chifley Local Area Command yesterday said police were investigating the claims of 13 alleged victims, but he could not say how many former staff members were under investigation.

Police initially identified five victims when the investigations began last August, with a further eight coming forward after the priest was arrested in May.

There was no suggestion any of the alleged offenders remained at the school.

"The allegations centre around the period of 1970 to the early 1980s. So, at this stage, all the inquiries are at least over 20 years old," Superintendent Goodwin said.

Some media reports said as many as 40 former students had come forward with claims of abuse at the hands of school staff.

The Daily Telegraph yesterday published interviews with alleged victims that claimed boys at the school were subjected to sexual abuse during night prayer sessions and were sometimes forced to abuse each other in orgies.

"They got a group of between eight and 12 of us together and they'd just start chanting and I would wake up during these sessions and see what was going on," one of the alleged victims

said. "It was like an orgy."

Superintendent Goodwin would not comment on claims made in the article, saying it was a "sensitive investigation".

He urged other victims to contact police. "I'd imagine it would be very hard for anyone that's subject to these sort of things to come forward," he said.

"NSW Police Force will be providing every form of support we possibly can to make the process for them as trouble-free as possible."

Hetty Johnston, of the Bravehearts sexual abuse victims support group, supported the plea.

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