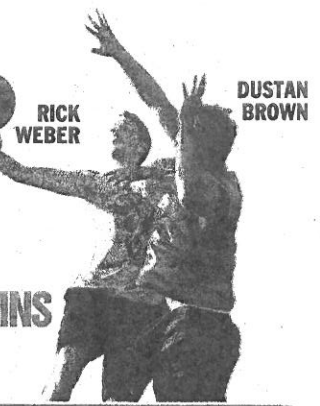




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Poll: Senator too old to run

By DON BENNETT
Staff Writer

Sen. Frank Lautenberg is too old to run again in 2008 to represent New Jersey in Washington, six in 10 voters told the Rutgers Eagleton Poll.

Although the 83-year-old Democrat is completing his fourth six-year term, the poll found a surprisingly large number of voters



Lautenberg

who did not know him, or who had no opinion about the job he has been doing in Washington.

Of those who had, a majority want somebody else to fill his seat, the poll revealed.

The lack of name recognition was apparent when 13 percent of those asked

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Church: Dismiss sex abuse suit

Men allege they were molested by reverend

Lawsuit cites 18 years of abuse

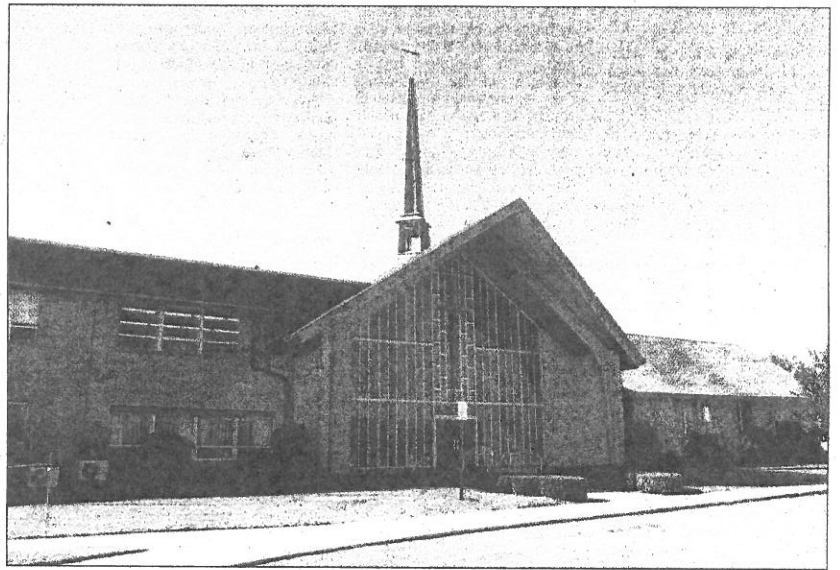
By KATHLEEN HOPKINS
Gannett New Jersey

TOMS RIVER — Attorneys for St. Thomas Lutheran Church in Brick, its school and its parent organization will be in court today to ask a judge to dismiss a \$100 million lawsuit brought by 20 grown men who claim they were molested as children by the onetime, now deceased church pastor in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

The attorneys representing the church and its St. Thomas Christian Academy, both on Salmon Street in Brick, a group of 192 Evangelical Lutheran churches known as the New Jersey Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will appear before Superior Court Judge Thomas E. O'Brien seeking dismissal of the lawsuit against them on grounds that the two-year statute of limitations to file a claim has long passed, and that state law immunizes charitable organizations from such lawsuits.

Joining in their arguments for dismissal of the lawsuit will be attorneys for the estate of the Rev. Robert L. Slegel, who is alleged to have molested the children, his widow, Cynthia Slegel, who was the onetime principal of the academy, and the Rev. John M. Elstad, a onetime associate pastor of the church under Slegel who rose to the position of pastor when Slegel resigned amid scandal in 1993. They are also named as defendants in the suit, originally filed in 2005 by Toms River attorney Robert R. Fuggi Jr.

An associate of Fuggi, Phillipsburg attorney Gregory Gianforcaro, will appear before O'Brien to argue that state law immunizes charitable organizations against liability only in cases of negligence, not in instances of intentional acts of sexual abuse.



File Photo

Attorneys for St. Thomas Lutheran Church in Brick will ask a judge to dismiss a \$100 million lawsuit by 20 men who allege they were molested by a former reverend at the church.

Gianforcaro also plans to argue that the law allows for suspension of the statute of limitations in instances of repressed memory or until the victims of child sexual abuse realize that is what caused their present emotional problems.

Following oral arguments, O'Brien will be called upon to decide whether the lawsuit can move forward.

The original lawsuit was brought by six men, but Fuggi has amended it twice to include a total of 19 plaintiffs who claim they were abused by Slegel as children. There is a 20th man also being represented by Fuggi who also claims abuse by Slegel. Fuggi said he soon plans to amend the complaint again to include that man as a defendant.

Fuggi said he is seeking \$5 million in damages for each of the men, bringing the total claims to \$100 million.

Civil suits involving molestation accusations against clergymen have burgeoned in recent years, sparked in part by the highly publicized criminal prosecution in 2002 of former Catholic priest John

WHAT THEY SAY:

The Congregation Council of St. Thomas Lutheran Church has previously released the following statement about the lawsuit alleging that the Rev. Robert L. Slegel molested boys:

"No allegations have been made against any current pastors or current members of St. Thomas Lutheran Church... Neither St. Thomas Lutheran Church nor its members had any prior knowledge of Slegel's behavior with the plaintiffs as alleged in the lawsuit. St. Thomas Lutheran Church does not tolerate inappropriate sexual be-

havior of any kind. When such behavior is alleged, the congregation will notify the appropriate authorities and take appropriate action as warranted."

Robert R. Fuggi, the attorney representing 20 plaintiffs in the case, said the following:

"We never thought anything like this would happen in our community. It has happened here on a very large scale... this is one of those cases that will make a difference. If one child is saved, then we've done something good."

— Kathleen Hopkins

Geoghan in Massachusetts. The Archdiocese of Boston subsequently paid \$85 million to settle 552 claims of sexual abuse.

Last month, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles announced it would pay \$660 million to settle claims brought by more than 500 people who said they were abused by Roman Catholic clergy members. If approved, the settlement would be the largest by

any single diocese in a clergy sexual abuse scandal, the New York Times reported.

The scandal has not been limited to the Catholic Church. Christianity Today's Web site has reported settlements of jury awards in the \$30 million range in several states stemming from allegations that Lutheran ministers sexually abused them.

Fuggi has said he be-

lieves the suit he has filed is the first of its kind in Ocean County.

The men alleging abuse in the suit now range in age from 29 to 52, Fuggi said. Some were as young as 5 and as old as 15 when they claim to have endured the molestation, according to court papers.

Slegel is alleged to have committed the molestation

See Church, Page A2

No tornado, but heavy winds, hail

By CHRIS LUNDY
Staff Writer

LITTLE EGG HARBOR — After rain, wind and lightning blasted through the area yesterday afternoon, authorities investigated whether a tornado touched down here.

Parts of the county were hit with a fast-moving thunderstorm, while other areas remained dry.

Heavy rain, hail, and strong winds pressed the township for about half an hour. The worst hit were the Mystic Islands, West

Tuckerton, and Parkertown sections of the township. Lightning was reported throughout the area, striking trees and power lines, police said.

The National Weather Service responded to the area to survey the damage to determine if a tornado had formed, police said.

A weather service meteorologist later reported that there had been no tornado, just wind damage.

The wind blew debris into the street. At least

See Winds, Page A2

Delays, lack of parking frustrate store's neighbors

By ANGELA SANTORIELLO
Staff Writer

TOMS RIVER — The lack of parking in front of a Normandy Beach convenience store is not the only reason residents were up in arms at Wednesday night's Township Planning Board meeting.

Neighbors of the Check-Rite convenience store, located on Route 35 North and Normandy Way, went to the planning board meeting to object to plans to increase the retail space at the store, and build an apartment on top of the

existing building. The building is owned by Avalon Distinctive Caters.

But they grew even more frustrated when the applicant's attorney Marc Galella, with R.C. Shea and Associates, showed up without a promised set of revised architectural plans that would show adequate parking will be made available — which meant that the planning board hearing had to be delayed until October.

Galella said a computer glitch at the architectural

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