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Man Files Church Suit Claiming Sexual Abuse

Albany Herkimer County Resident Brings Case in Albany, Boston

By Michele Morgan Bolton
Times Union (Albany, NY)
July 15, 2004

A 62-year-old Herkimer County man sued Boston and Albany church officials Wednesday, claiming that a 50-year cycle of sexual and emotional abuse by Catholic clergy ruined his life and led to attempted suicide and a near-fatal exorcism.

David Leonard struggled to describe his half-century quest for acknowledgment during a news conference arranged by attorney John Aretakis at the Albany County Courthouse.

Aretakis, who represents dozens of alleged priest abuse victims, is working with a Massachusetts lawyer who filed the 34-page civil case in the Bay State.

Among Leonard's claims are that he was molested at age 12 by a Stigmatine priest at a Berkshires summer camp and was forced into a homosexual encounter in 1990, when he was 50, by the Rev. Anthony Curran, an associate pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church in Schenectady.

Leonard also claims Curran had a collection of child pornography.

Curran did not return a request for comment late Wednesday.

Diocesan spokesman Kenneth Goldfarb said Leonard has a history of conflicting charges against the church.

"John Aretakis and his client have made several, shifting complaints against priests of the Albany Diocese and elsewhere," Goldfarb said in a prepared statement. "Mr. Aretakis has blocked the investigation of those complaints by refusing to allow the Albany Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Review Board to interview Mr. Leonard."

Aretakis has kept a relatively low profile in recent weeks since a four-month probe he prompted into allegations of sexual misconduct against Bishop Howard Hubbard came up empty in June.

But on Wednesday, Aretakis said his work would continue.

"There is still a great darkness that pervades the Albany Catholic Diocese," he said, as Leonard's wife, Nancy, nodded. "There is a great secrecy, a shroud of manipulation and distortion that protects these men," he said.

Leonard told reporters he wanted to go public without having to go through Hubbard and Mary Jo White, a former federal prosecutor hired to conduct the investigation of the bishop. He said he went to the diocese in 2002 with the names of four priests he knew to be homosexually active. But, after signing an affidavit witnessed by victim advocate Teresa Rodrigues, Leonard said he next saw the document published in White's report -- but in a way that discounted his claims.

"The diocese betrayed me," he said. "All I got was lies and deceit. They have not done anything to reach out to victims. And it will never end as long as they continue to lie."

Leonard, the father of four children, admitted that he has spent significant time in psychiatric hospitals. He also acknowledged trying to kill himself in 1978 by dousing himself with gasoline, but the matches got wet and wouldn't light.

That was after a 1978 exorcism suggested by the Rev. John Bertolucci, former pastor of St. Joseph's of Little Falls, Leonard said. Bertolucci was removed from the ministry in 2002 after it was revealed that he had sexually abused minors in the 1970s.

"I have been blamed for the abuse all my life," said Leonard, who at one point wanted to follow in the steps of his uncle, also a Stigmatine priest. "I blamed myself for being evil."

The self-blame started after his initial abuse at 12, and then again as a teenager at a junior seminary in Wellesley, Mass., he said. When he told church officials he'd been molested, the reply was 'People will know you made the priest do this to you,' " he claimed. "And how could these good priests be evil? We were told they could do no wrong."

Albany church officials have denied that Leonard underwent an exorcism and, instead, said it might have been a "healing."

But Leonard said he knows what happened to him, and what hasn't happened at the hands of the diocese: "What I'm asking of the Roman Catholic Church is validation. All I have to do is keep telling the truth. I've already told it over and over and over again."

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