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St. Paul attorney Jeff Anderson announced May 14 that he is representing five sexual abuse survivors suing the Holy See for names of clergy sexual abuse offenders worldwide and the names of church leaders who have been involved in abuse cover-up.

The lawsuit's defendants include Ben, Luke and Stephen Hoffman, brothers abused by then-Fr. Curtis Wehmeyer while he was at Blessed Sacrament in St. Paul from 2006 to 2012. He was removed from ministry in 2012, when the abuse was first reported to civil and church authorities, and then laicized in 2015. He is serving a prison sentence in Wisconsin for his abuse of Ben Hoffman there in 2011.

Also participating in the lawsuit are survivors James Keenan, who was abused in the 1980s at Risen Savior in Burnsville by then-Fr. Thomas Adamson, and Manuel Vega, who was abused by a religious order priest in California in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The lawsuit alleges that the Holy See — meaning the pope in his role as head of the Catholic Church — was in a position to know the danger that the abusing priests in

the plaintiffs' cases posed to children but mandated policies of secrecy that discouraged church leaders from reporting sexual abuse to civil authorities.

Anderson said that the church legislation Pope Francis released May 9 did not go far enough in requiring church leaders to report abuse allegations to law enforcement.

That document requires abuse and its cover-up to be reported to church authorities and for those authorities to comply with civil law, stating "these norms apply without prejudice to the rights and obligations established in each place by state laws, particularly those concerning any reporting obligations to the competent civil authorities."

In the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, people with sexual abuse allegations are encouraged to contact law enforcement before contacting church officials. Allegations made directly to the archdiocese are promptly reported to law enforcement.

Anderson said that his office's next step will be to serve the suit on the Vatican, which may be a lengthy process. He expects the Vatican to "put up sovereign immunity defenses" but that his office is "ready for battle."

Anderson & Associates previously sued the Vatican regarding clergy sexual abuse in 2002, but the suit was unsuccessful. Anderson said during a news conference that he has confidence that this suit could have a different outcome because his body of evidence demonstrates "all roads lead to Rome." In October, he announced a suit in California against the Vatican in which Keenan also was a defendant, but Anderson has since dropped that suit.

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In a May 14 statement, Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis said that "having met with scores of survivors of clergy sex abuse, I understand the anger and frustration at the church that is apparent in the lawsuit filed today by Jeffrey Anderson."

"On July 20, 2016, the archdiocese appeared in Ramsey County Court and admitted to wrongdoing in the way it dealt with Curtis Wehmeyer," the archbishop said. "On that same day, I publicly stated: '(W)e failed — in what we have done and in what

we have failed to do. ... We failed to give priority to the safety and well-being of the children he hurt over the interests of Curtis Wehmeyer and the archdiocese.'"

"I am profoundly sorry for their suffering," he said, "and I am very grateful to the Hoffmans for sharing their stories with others and, in one instance, with me. I thank them for their courage. I thank them for being staunch child protection advocates."

He continued: "It is my hope that the resolution of the criminal and civil cases, as well as the bankruptcy case, combined with concrete child protection steps and restorative justice actions already underway here, will bring greater healing to this local church.

"To further these efforts, the archdiocese has recently hired a victims/survivors outreach coordinator, a survivor herself of abusive behavior on the part of a priest, to assist us in our outreach efforts. I remain grateful to Pope Francis for his recent legislation establishing clear procedures for holding priests bishops, archbishops and cardinals accountable for their actions."

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Wiering is editor of The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.