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Vatican



In this March 4, 2015, file photo, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick speaks during a memorial service in South Bend, Ind. Four alleged victims of the former Cardinal have filed a $75 million lawsuit against the Vatican that claims it should be held liable for allowing the disgraced cleric to serve in multiple positions in New York and New Jersey when it knew of numerous allegations of sexual abuse against him. (South Bend Tribune via AP Pool/Robert Franklin)

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New York — November 20, 2020
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Four accusers of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick have filed a lawsuit against the Vatican, arguing it should be held liable for allowing the now-disgraced cleric to serve in multiple positions in New York and New Jersey when it knew of numerous allegations of sexual abuse against him.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Newark, New Jersey, where McCarrick served as archbishop from the mid-1980s until 2000. Prior to that, he served as bishop of the Diocese of Metuchen, also in New Jersey, and as a priest in the archdiocese of New York.

He was appointed archbishop of Washington, D.C., in 2000 by Pope John Paul II and became one of the highest-ranking, most visible Roman Catholic officials in the United States and a skilled fundraiser. McCarrick was defrocked in 2019 after an investigation substantiated allegations of sexual abuse against him.

Three of the plaintiffs were parishioners who allege McCarrick abused them as youths in the 1980s. The fourth is a priest who alleges McCarrick abused him at a beach house in New Jersey in the 1990s and that a fellow priest told him to forget about what happened "for the good of the church."

An internal Vatican report released Nov. 10 found that bishops, cardinals and popes downplayed or dismissed multiple reports of sexual misconduct by the now-90-year-old McCarrick, who lives as a layman in a residence for priests.

The plaintiffs seek unspecified monetary damages, as well as an injunction to force the Vatican to release the names of more than 3,000 clerics who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse, and all documents relating to those claims.

Popes from John Paul II to Benedict to Francis "chose to conceal and condone this conduct," Jeff Anderson, an attorney representing the plaintiffs, said Nov. 19.

The lawsuit characterizes the Holy See, the government of the Catholic Church located in Vatican City, as a "vast enterprise" that exerted total control over McCarrick, its employee, and had the sole authority to remove him but refused to do so because of its policy of keeping sexual abuse allegations secret.

"If Defendant Holy See had not engaged in its vast enterprise of soliciting funds, recruiting members, and other commercial activities, and had not deceived Plaintiffs while undertaking this commercial activity, Plaintiffs would not have been abused," the lawsuit reads.

The lawsuit's claims include violations of international human rights laws, consumer fraud, breach of contract, negligence and infliction of emotional distress.

An email message was left after hours Nov. 19 with a spokesperson for the Vatican in Rome.

The Holy See has successfully defended previous lawsuits by Anderson and others by arguing that it is immune as a foreign sovereign and its priests aren't Vatican employees. Anderson said Nov. 19 that the immunity defense has been weakened over the years.

"It's our belief that there's a clear legal path that must be taken," he said.

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