News

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As a deadline nears for new lawsuits in sexual abuse cases, 66 Catholic clergy and religious accused of sexual abuse have been identified in 116 lawsuits filed in Northern California. Of those, 14 have been publicly identified for the first time.

These new accusations have come to light under under a 2019 California law that extended the statute of limitations for abuse cases. Assembly Bill 218 provided for a three-year window that began on Jan. 1 in 2020. The deadline to file new lawsuits is Dec. 31.

“This public data collected is believed to be a small percentage of what attorneys (and) advocates anticipate the final number of lawsuits filed under this historic legislation to be,” according to a statement from Jeff Anderson and Associates, which is handling many of the cases under the bill.

Attorney Mike Finnegan, in a statement, urged the public to come forward with information about the clergy’s current status and whereabouts. Without knowledge of their current location, or “if they are dead or alive, and whether they have access

to children, there is a great public risk," Finnegan said.

According to the lawsuits, those publicly identified for the first time, listed with locales where alleged abuse took place, are John A. Lynch, Christian Sandholdt, Robert Gemmet and Joseph Watt, all in San Francisco; John Francis Scanlon and Domingos S. Jacque in Oakland; James Corley in Santa Rosa; Sidney Hall in Sacramento; Benedict Reams in Moraga; Sr. M. Rosella McConnell in Berkeley; Elwood Geary in San Jose; Henry Hall in Monterey County; William Dodson in Fresno; and Robert H. Lewis in Dinuba.

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Jacque died in 2016, according to the Bay Area News Group. And, according to The Sacramento Bee, Hall also died in 2016.

The Catholic Church has instituted reforms to address cases of sexual abuse by clergy, including issuing guidelines for dioceses for reporting abuse. Dioceses across the country, including the dioceses of San Jose, Oakland and Sacramento, have released lists of priests credibly accused of abusing kids.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests has criticized the Archdiocese of San Francisco for not releasing its names. The organization has also called on the Diocese of Sacramento to expand its list. Hall's name is not on the list, the Sacramento Bee reported.

In a statement to Religion News Service, the Archdiocese of San Francisco said it "publishes on its website names of priests and deacons in good standing who have faculties to minister here in the Archdiocese. Those with questions about a priest or deacon can refer to this list."

"The Archdiocese addresses allegations related to lawsuits through appropriate legal channels. Other than allegations that are facially not possible, investigations are initiated for any claims received. Any priest under investigation is prohibited from exercising public ministry in accordance with canon law as well as Archdiocesan and USCCB policies," according to the statement.