News



A lawsuit launched in March has accused Father Thomas Rosica, the national director of World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto, of sexually assaulting a young priest in the lead-up to event. Rosica is pictured in a 2015 file photo. (OSV News/Paul Haring)

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A lawsuit launched in March has accused Father Thomas Rosica, the national director of World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto, of sexually assaulting a young priest in the lead-up to the event. Rosica, who served as a communications liaison at the 2019 summit on sexual abuse convened by Pope Francis, maintains the allegations should be handled by a church — not secular — court.

The suit, according to the online news agency The Pillar, which broke the news Aug. 28, alleges Rosica developed a mentoring relationship with the plaintiff, a newly ordained Canadian priest, in the 1990s. The priest was in graduate studies at the time, The Pillar reports, and invited to assist Rosica in preparing for World Youth Day, which drew an estimated 800,000 pilgrims to Toronto in the summer of 2002. According to The Pillar, Rosica's faculties for priestly ministry have been withdrawn pending the outcome of the process.

Rosica is alleged to have developed a close relationship with the unnamed young priest, one of "authority and trust," the lawsuit alleges, according to The Pillar. This "allowed Rosica an opportunity to be alone with the plaintiff and to exert control over him, prey upon him and sexually abuse him," the lawsuit alleges.

Rosica has denied any improper conduct and has urged a judge to dismiss the lawsuit, arguing the allegations should play out instead in a canonical court of the Catholic Church. He has argued the Ontario court has no jurisdiction in this dispute and that an ecclesiastical court is where the matter should be heard on the basis that Rosica and the plaintiff are ordained priests and that the alleged assaults are said to have occurred while they were "engaged in duties on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church."

The lawsuit also alleges the Congregation of St. Basil, Rosica's religious order, failed to supervise Rosica. According to The Pillar, it alleged the order knew of similar allegations against Rosica involving young males and "took steps to attempt to cover-up the behavior."

The allegations have yet to be proven in a court of law.

OSV News has confirmed the filing and has requested the relevant documents from the court.

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Rosica is originally an American priest from Rochester, New York, who has held a number of high-profile positions with the Catholic Church and its entities. His career within the Catholic Church took off following World Youth Day in Toronto. He went on to found and run Salt+Light Television in 2003 and was appointed a consultor to the then-Pontifical Council for Social Communication in 2009. In 2013, he was appointed a Vatican spokesman ahead of the conclave that elected Pope Francis and was a media adviser at two Synods of Bishops, in 2008 and 2018.

Rosica was also the English-language liaison at the Vatican summit on clergy sexual abuse in February 2019 and English-language media attache of the Holy See press office.

Rosica would run into trouble in 2019, however, following serial plagiarism allegations in his published works. Within a few months of the scandal breaking that February, he resigned his position at Salt+Light and other entities, including the collegium of the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto and the boards of the University of St. Thomas in Houston and St. John Fisher College (today a university) in his hometown of Rochester.