News



A jury box, judge's chair and witness stand are seen in this courtroom illustration photo. A federal jury in New Orleans has ordered the Holy Cross order to pay nearly $2.4 million in damages to a man who reported being sexually abused by one of its members in the late 1960s. (OSV News/Reuters/Chip East)

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New Orleans — June 27, 2025

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In a historic verdict, a federal jury in New Orleans has ordered a Catholic religious order to pay nearly $2.4 million in damages to a man who reported being sexually abused by one of its members in the late 1960s.

John Lousteau, 68, asserted that he was sexually abused while attending an overnight summer camp for boys at the Holy Cross school in New Orleans. He maintained that his abuser was the camp's director, Stanley Repucci, who belonged to the Holy Cross order that ran the school.

The legal victory for Lousteau and his attorney, Kristi Schubert of the Lamothe law firm, is the first since Louisiana's supreme court in 2024 upheld a state law allowing molestation survivors to pursue civil damages no matter how long ago the abuse had occurred. Previously, Louisiana law barred anyone over age 28 from seeking such damages. Experts have established that the average age an adult reports child sexual abuse was 52.

The verdict, rendered Wednesday (June 25), was thought to be the first time a jury in Louisiana awarded such high damages to a molestation victim whose abuse went back so many decades.

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It also comes as the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans is trying to exit Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection by offering to pay an average of less than $400,000 apiece to about 600 victims of a clerical abuse scandal that has roiled the organization for decades. The declaration of bankruptcy in 2020 indefinitely froze individual lawsuits against the archdiocese.

Lousteau's case is not related, but the amount of the award suggests how much abuse survivors might be entitled to if the archdiocese's efforts to reorganize in bankruptcy are unsuccessful and it can again be sued by victims on an individual basis.

In his lawsuit, Lousteau recounted how he had struggled with alcohol and drug addiction after his abuse by Repucci, who has since died. Lousteau previously revealed how he also grappled with post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety and insomnia, conditions which destined him to what he described as a "dumpster-fire trainwreck of a life."

Lousteau said Holy Cross officials offered counseling and "sympathetic words" while indicating to him his account about his abuse was "credible."

Yet the order ultimately didn't pay for his counseling and then stopped returning his lawyer's calls, he said.

Attorneys for the Holy Cross order and school argued in part that Lousteau failed to do more to limit the consequences of his abuse.

On June 25, after a three-day trial, a jury at New Orleans' federal courthouse found there was a preponderance of evidence that Lousteau had been molested as a child by Repucci and that Holy Cross officials — as the abuser's employer while he was alive — owed Lousteau about $2.38 million in damages.

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Attorneys for the school did not immediately comment. A statement from a Holy Cross order spokesperson said it was "evaluating its options moving forward." The organizations could ask an appellate court to reduce the award.

Schubert declined to comment on the verdict, saying post-trial motions were possible.

At one point, a federal judge named Jay Zainey — known for his devotion to the Catholic faith — ruled that the law enabling suits like Lousteau's was unconstitutional. That ruling was widely interpreted as potentially a decisive win for all Catholic institutions to settle abuse claims more affordably.

But the state supreme court decision upholding the law effectively negated Zainey's ruling.

Clergy molestation survivors whose claims are ensnared in the New Orleans Archdiocese's Chapter 11 financial reorganization could vote in September whether

to accept the amounts it is offering, which on average are less than 17% of what Lousteau won at trial against Holy Cross. Attorneys representing hundreds of those survivors oppose the settlement.

The proposed settlement needs support from two-thirds of survivors who vote on it for it to gain approval.

This story was originally published in The Guardian.

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