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Judge: No questioning Vatican officials in abuse case

by Catholic News Service

PORTLAND, Ore. -- A federal judge in Portland has declined to order face-to-face questioning of Vatican officials in a lawsuit claiming that the Vatican was the employer of an abusive priest in the 1960s.

U.S. District Judge Michael W. Mosman ruled Dec. 1 that attorneys for the plaintiff in the case, John V. Doe v. Holy See, had not proven the need for an exception to the immunity given to foreign nations under U.S. law.

The Vatican has published online more than 70 pages of documents which, it said, prove the Vatican had no knowledge of a priest's sexual misconduct until he and his religious order petitioned for his laicization. It also has provided more than 1,800 pages of documentation to the court.

The case involves the late Andrew Ronan, a former Servite priest who was laicized in 1966. A man, now 63, who says he was abused by Ronan in Oregon in 1965 is seeking to hold the Vatican legally responsible, saying Ronan was a Vatican employee.

In June 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court left standing a lower court ruling that Doe could try to hold the Vatican financially responsible for his sexual abuse by Ronan, if he could persuade the court that the priest was an employee of the Holy See.

When the online posting was made in mid-August, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said in a statement that it was being done "to assist those in the public who wish to study the matter carefully, and to assist the United States court in resolving the remaining issues in the case."

William Barton, an attorney representing Doe, told The Associated Press that the decision would likely mark the end of efforts to question Vatican officials face to face but that the plaintiff would continue to work to prove Ronan was a Vatican employee. No trial date has been set in the case.

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