

\$10 million Los Angeles settlement first since document release

Brian Roewe | Mar. 28, 2013

As Cardinal Roger Mahony entered the Sistine Chapel in Rome March 12 to begin the process of electing the next pope, his name made headlines in his home diocese for other reasons.

The cardinal, the Los Angeles archdiocese and an ex-priest agreed to settlements in four clergy abuse-related cases, totaling \$9.9 million. The settlements are the first since the late January court-ordered release of 12,000 pages of abuse-related documents, and Mahony's ban from public and administrative duties in the archdiocese.

On the same day another case, at the northern end of the state, also made headlines when a visiting priest was arrested on suspicion of child abuse.

The former priest at the center of the Los Angeles settlements was Michael Baker, who was removed from the priesthood in 2000 and convicted in 2007 of molesting two children. He was paroled in 2011 after initially receiving a 10-year prison sentence.

The release of the files factored into the settlements, an attorney for the alleged victims told the *Los Angeles Times*.

"Once we got the files, it confirmed everything we had argued for years and years. Cardinal Mahony's fingerprints were all over the case," Vince Finaldi told the *Times*.

The documents pertaining to Baker reveal that in December 1986 Mahony sent him for psychological evaluation in New Mexico after Baker confessed to the then-archbishop his sexual relationships with two boys, beginning in the early 1980s. The psychological evaluation expressed concern with Baker's attitude toward the relationships, saying they were "quite disturbing to listen to."

"At no point did he indicate any awareness at all that his sexual involvement with these two boys may have consequences for them nor did he seem the least bit concerned about any consequences for him except that he may now have to go through a treatment program which he feels would be extraneous," read the evaluations, which did recommend immediate treatment.

Therapy continued for Baker as he re-entered ministry in the archdiocese. He initially worked with the elderly and retired priests before serving numerous parishes as an administrator or associate pastor. Ultimately, the archdiocese placed him on inactive leave in April 2000 after allegations came forward that he had continued to molest the same boys.

In 2002, the accusations became public. In 2010, at the urging of the *Times*, the courts released the deposition Mahony made earlier that year regarding Baker. In it, he stated his mistake was believing the former priest.

"I believed him all along that he was making progress, that he was going to the therapist. There were no new

offenses. And I just believed that he -- he really intended to reform. And we found out later that he lived a huge lie all those years," he said in the deposition.

As part of the settlement, none of the parties admitted wrongdoing, Reuters reported.

In the months ahead, more settlements are likely to come, according to one canon lawyer who has served as a consultant to lawyers representing victims in the archdiocese.

"There will be more suits, and it will reveal also that the depth of cover-up and lying by the archbishop is deeper than we know, if that can be imagined," Dominican Fr. Tom Doyle told *NCR*.

He also speculated Mahony himself could eventually face charges.

"I would not be at all surprised if Mahony were, if another grand jury were convened and Mahony were indicted. Not at all surprised," he said.

Farther north in the state, new abuse allegations involving a foreign visiting priest emerged March 12.

Fr. Julio Guarin-Sosa, a visiting priest to the Stockton, Calif., diocese, was arrested on suspicion of sexual battery and molestation of a minor. The alleged incident occurred in Yuba City, Calif., part of the Sacramento diocese, and approximately 80 miles north of his assignment at St. Anne Parish in Lodi, Calif.

Guarin-Sosa was arraigned March 12 in Sutter County Superior Court and is being held in the county jail. The Colombian priest had been assisting at St. Anne for almost a month, while his brother, Fr. Mario Guarin, a parochial vicar at the parish, was on vacation.

The Stockton diocese released a brief statement shortly after Guarin-Sosa's arrest.

"As a result of the charges, Father Guarin's permission to exercise ministry in the Diocese of Stockton has been revoked. His diocese in Colombia has been informed," the diocese stated.

The diocese has not supplied Guarin-Sosa a lawyer, primarily since he was a supply priest and not officially part of the diocese, said Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Terry Davis, director of communications for the diocese. She also confirmed that the diocese has not been in contact with the priest since his arrest.

In a letter sent March 12 to parents with children at the school and in religious education, St. Anne pastor Fr. Brandon Ware expressed sadness at Guarin-Sosa's arrest, and sought to assure the community the priest had little contact with its children.

"The only interaction that I, and our Ministry Team, can recall is that of the First Reconciliation liturgy celebrated on March 2nd," Ware wrote. "At that time Fr. Julio did hear confessions, but did so while the Church was populated with a number of other people. He was, at no time, and to the best of our knowledge, ever alone with any of our children."

According to the diocese, Stockton Bishop Stephen Blaire required and received "a letter of good standing" from the priest's home diocese in Colombia before accepting him.

That letter wasn't enough, according to a leading support group for clergy abuse victims. The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, said "a simple background check" on Guarin-Sosa could have

prevented the alleged abuse.

"Unfortunately, the case of visiting priest Rev. Julio Guarin-Sosa is not unique. California's bishops have a habit of accepting foreign priests with little to no investigation of their backgrounds," SNAP stated, alluding to cases of abusive foreign priests accepted into the Los Angeles archdiocese during Mahony's tenure as archbishop.

"What has been in effect is when a priest comes from another country, he must have an official letter that ensures he is a priest in good standing. He did have that, from his archbishop in Colombia, and that has been what we accepted," Davis said, adding that the arrest will lead them to re-examine if that policy remains adequate.

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