

2 priests on New Orleans' list of accused clerics face additional molestation claims in new lawsuit

- BY RAMON ANTONIO VARGAS | RVARGAS@THEADVOCATE.COM

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In the latest legal volley aimed at the Archdiocese of New Orleans over alleged clerical abuse dating back decades, an Illinois man filed a lawsuit Wednesday accusing two priests of sexually molesting him on various occasions while he served as an altar boy at St. Raphael the Archangel Church in Gentilly roughly four decades ago.

The priests, Michael Fraser and Paul Calamari, were among the 57 clergy members identified by Archbishop Gregory Aymond as likely child molesters on Nov. 2. The list enumerated, for the first time in the history of the local Catholic Church, priests and deacons who over decades had been stripped of their ministries after facing credible allegations of sexually abusing minors.

In the 23-page suit, the plaintiff recalls becoming an altar boy at St. Raphael the Archangel Church and School when he was a first-grader there in 1978. The lawsuit said Fraser and Calamari both worked at St. Raphael and each subsequently abused the plaintiff on several occasions over the ensuing years.

Baton Rouge bishop includes more details on alleged sex abusers than New Orleans, but why?

Two attorneys on the plaintiff's legal team, John Denenea and Richard Trahant, have filed a number of similar cases since the archdiocese released its list in an attempt to win back the trust of parishioners outraged by the Catholic Church's ongoing clergy abuse crisis.

The archdiocese declined to comment on the suit, which was allotted to Orleans Parish Civil District Court Judge Sidney Cates IV.

PAUL CALAMARI.

In the filing, the plaintiff contends that Fraser fondled, groped and “indecently handled” him during one of several sleepovers held at the church rectory. When he was a little older, about 11, he said, he attended a pizza dinner and sleepover with other boys at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Pearl River.

As the plaintiff recalls, he ended up rubbing lotion on Fraser’s feet while the priest fondled himself.

When the plaintiff left the room, Fraser called out, “Boy, you know what you just did to me? You gave my feet the best hand job ever.”

The plaintiff “immediately felt sick to his stomach,” according to the suit, which was also prepared by attorneys Soren Gisleson and Jed Cain of the Herman, Herman & Katz law firm.

Meanwhile, Calamari would invite the plaintiff and other young boys to his family's summer home on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The priest would hold play-wrestling matches and in the process fondle the children’s genitals, including the plaintiff’s, the suit says.

In unrelated lawsuits filed and settled years later, Fraser was accused of abusing other boys while at Sts. Peter and Paul beginning in the mid-1980s, and the church removed him from ministry in 2004. A lawsuit that was filed and settled after Fraser's removal alleged that he abused yet another boy at St. Raphael, which was merged with two other parishes to become Transfiguration of Our Lord after Hurricane Katrina.

For his part, Calamari had been accused of sexually abusing a minor before his 1980 ordination to the priesthood. He went to a psychiatric treatment facility for priests in Pennsylvania in 1997 and was later assigned to work in Delaware, but officials there sidelined him from ministry in 2003 after receiving credible abuse allegations against him.

The plaintiff in the most recent suit said he didn't come forward with his claims until his abusers' names appeared on the list released by Aymond in the fall.

Both men are alive and technically still priests despite their removal from ministry, according to the lawsuit. Neither could be reached, though Fraser has previously denied molesting children. Fraser now lives in Texas and Calamari in Pennsylvania, the suit said.

They have never been criminally prosecuted on any accusations.

In a statement, Denenea complained that priests who are removed from public ministry but not excommunicated from the church can still collect pensions and other retirement benefits. Local church officials have previously said they are legally obligated to pay priests their share of the archdiocesan pension plan if they contributed to it.



MICHAEL FRASER.

The plaintiff seeks compensation for physical, emotional and spiritual harm. He said he developed post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other problems after being preyed upon, which he contends the church could have prevented if it had adequately vetted candidates for the priesthood.

While plaintiffs can be barred by a statute of limitations from recovering damages for long-ago abuse, attorneys often argue those limitations should not apply when there was an effort to

conceal the alleged misbehavior. The plaintiff's lawsuit said Catholic officials didn't try hard enough to identify and aid any other Fraser and Calamari victims, violating transparency rules the church adopted after its clergy abuse scandal first hit a fever pitch in Boston in 2002.

Aside from Fraser, Calamari and the Catholic Church, the suit names two insurers as defendants. One is Archdiocese of New Orleans Indemnity, which the local church founded in Vermont with a \$2 million investment, according to the suit.

One of that company's purposes is to cover personal misconduct liability, up to \$300,000 per occurrence, not to exceed a total annual amount of \$3.5 million, the suit said.

Denenea contended that the company hasn't paid out "a single claim" and questioned whether its sole purpose is to "make tax-free money," given its association with the church.

Denenea also said his other cases against the church have been contentious, despite invitations for abuse victims to come forward and be made whole.

The church has previously said that the indemnity company is only available for claims involving incidents that occurred after it was founded a few years ago.