

## SF archdiocese responds to lawsuit over list of child sex abusers

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Published: Friday, September 7th, 2018 at 12:02am  
Updated: Thursday, September 6th, 2018 at 4:58pm

SANTA FE, N.M. — The Archdiocese of Santa Fe is defending itself, mostly, against a Santa Fe man’s lawsuit that says the archdiocese got it wrong when it listed him as among the Catholic clergy who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing children in New Mexico.

In a court filing, the church admits that Rudy Blea was in fact never an ordained priest in the archdiocese and says it doesn’t know if he was ever ordained elsewhere, or that he was ever a Benedictine monk, as the list of credibly accused clergy published last year by the archdiocese suggested.

It listed him as “Br. Rudy Blea,” with his order or diocese identified as “Benedictines (OSB).” OSB is short for Order of St. Benedict. The archdiocese’s response to Blea’s lawsuit, though, “denies that Rudy Blea was listed as a ‘member’ of the Benedictine (OSB) Order.”

The archdiocese says in the court response to Blea’s lawsuit that Blea was a seminarian in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and had been credibly accused of “child sexual abuse that he committed under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe while residing at the Benedictine Monastery in Pecos, New Mexico.” The archdiocese acknowledges that Blea never pleaded guilty and was never convicted of the crime.

It also says that in correspondence with the archdiocese, Blea admitted to engaging in sexual conduct with a minor in 1970 and that the allegations were supported by sworn testimony of the accuser in civil litigation.

The filing says, however, that Blea “was not subject of a canonical conviction or finding that he had sexually abused a child.”

Blea’s lawyer says the archdiocese still doesn’t have the facts straight.

Santa Fe attorney Pierre Levy said in an interview this week that in addition to never being a Benedictine monk, Blea never resided at the Pecos monastery. He said Blea didn’t become a seminarian until 1974, years after the alleged sexual abuse.

An updated list of accused clergy dated Aug. 24 and now posted on the archdiocese’s website says the list includes seminarians – men in training to become priests – as well as “priests, deacons (and) religious” accused of sexual abuse of children.

The revised list now identifies Blea as “Seminarian Rudy Blea” and his religious order or assignments as “In Formation for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe 1969 to 1976.”

Blea filed his lawsuit in state district court in Santa Fe in March, saying he was defamed when the Archdiocese of Santa Fe last year published the names of 74 men it said were Catholic clergy who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing children in New Mexico.

In the lawsuit, Blea said that the archdiocese by implication “announced to the world” that he was “a Benedictine priest who was a child molester.” He maintained that he has never been a member of the Benedictine order or “employed by them or lived in residence with them at any time during his life.” Nor has he ever been “a brother, monk, deacon or priest in any diocese in the Catholic church,” his suit states.

The archdiocese’s list was published in the Journal and other New Mexico newspapers last September. At the time of the publication, Archbishop John C. Wester said in a statement that the list was a “critical step” in the archdiocese’s attempt to improve transparency and promote healing.

When the list was published, Blea's suit states, he was "horrified" that his name was among those listed and that he contacted the archdiocese, but it never investigated his protest of being wrongly accused. The archdiocese's court response maintains that Blea disputed "his status as clergy or religious, but did not dispute his status as credibly accused of child abuse."

Blea's lawsuit said that after the list was published, he was asked to cease and desist any contact with the parish of the Catholic Basilica of St. Francis in Santa Fe, whose church bulletins available online name him as a lay eucharistic minister or server, or any other parish within the diocese. The lawsuit states that the archdiocese made "vile and harmful public accusations" against him, but "never made a proper investigation of any past allegations."

Contact the writer.

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