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# Appeals court dismisses sexual abuse lawsuit against Vatican

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At the request of a man allegedly abused by a priest in 1965, the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed his case claiming the Vatican was the priest's employer and could be liable for damages.

Jeffrey Lena, the counsel for the Holy See, said in a statement that the lawsuit "never should have been filed in the first place."

He told Vatican Radio in an email interview, "This case was based on a couple of simple and erroneous ideas about the Catholic Church. First, that all priests are controlled by the Holy See and second that the Holy See receives information about the activities of all priests and makes specific decisions, either directly or 'by and through' dioceses and religious orders."

The plaintiff, a former Oregon resident known as John V. Doe, and his attorneys were trying to prove that the Vatican exercised direct control over priests, Lena said, but "this is not how the Catholic Church works."

If the Vatican had been recognized as the abusive priest's employer, the alleged victim of abuse could have sued the Vatican for damages.

The appeals court dismissed the case Monday. The plaintiff's lawyer, Jeff Anderson, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that his client still believes "all roads lead to Rome," but he has grown tired of the long legal battle.

An Oregon federal judge ruled in August 2012 that the Vatican was not the priest's employer, but Doe appealed.

On Lena's advice, the Vatican in 2011 published more than 70 pages of documents related to the priest -- the late Andrew Ronan, a former member of the Servite order, who was laicized in 1966.

"What the documents show, very clearly, is that the Holy See did not have any knowledge of this priest's propensity for abuse until after the abuse occurred, when it was notified by the petition for laicization that arrived from the priest's religious order. And when that petition arrived, it was granted by the Holy See without delay," Lena told Vatican Radio after the Oregon case was dismissed.

Speaking more generally about the clerical sexual abuse scandal, Lena said retired Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis "have provided moral leadership in the area by acknowledging not only the problem, but also setting expectations that the bishop's conferences of the world must create solid frameworks for abuse awareness and prevention."

"We have seen the widespread damage that abuse has done to bodies and souls," the lawyer said. "The harm has been great."

"My hope and expectation is that the Catholic Church will come to fully embrace the view that abuse awareness and prevention is one of the highest pastoral values, and that the church itself will come to be looked upon by all

other institutions in society as having provided models of prevention and never again sources of scandal," he told Vatican Radio.

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