

Virginia woman sues priest, diocese for alleged abuse during exorcism

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ARLINGTON, Va. -- A Virginia woman who claims a priest sexually abused her while meeting with her to perform exorcisms has filed suit against the Arlington Diocese and the Virginia-based pro-life group he formerly headed for \$5.3 million in damages.

The suit, filed June 19 in Arlington County Circuit Court on behalf of a woman identified only as Jane Doe, claims Father Thomas Euteneuer, former director of Human Life International, abused her between April 2008 and September 2010.

In a July 3 statement to Catholic News Service, Human Life International said Father Euteneuer "has already admitted to engaging in highly inappropriate and gravely sinful conduct with a young adult woman" but that "such behavior was never within the scope of his employment" with Human Life International.

"We intend to vigorously defend HLI from the false accusations made against it and we are undeterred in pursuing HLI's mission to build a culture of life and protect the unborn," the statement added.

The priest, who resigned from his position with Human Life International in August 2010, also returned that year to his home Diocese of Palm Beach, Fla.

In the suit, the woman said she signed an "agreement for spiritual help" with the priest in 2008 because she believed she was "in desperate need of the rite of exorcism," a ritual of evicting demons or other entities from a person or place believed to be possessed.

Father Euteneuer has said his "violations of chastity were limited to one person only, an adult woman." He also said he never "targeted vulnerable women or otherwise sought them out for spiritual direction."

The priest was not named in the suit because the woman reportedly already reached a private settlement with him.

The suit names Human Life International and the HLI Endowment as defendants. It also lists the Arlington Diocese, claiming it was "responsible for the governance of the Roman Catholic priests practicing within its assigned geographical borders," and Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde, stating that the bishop gave Father Euteneuer permission at least once to conduct an exorcism within the diocese.

Michael Donohue, director of communications for the Arlington Diocese, said in a June 29 statement to CNS that Father Euteneuer "is not and has never been a priest of the Diocese of Arlington."

Donohue added that the priest was subject to the bishop in the Diocese of Palm Beach since he was not in regular ministry in the Diocese of Arlington. He also noted that Human Life International is not under the direction or control of the Arlington Diocese.

Donohue also said Father Euteneuer was "not authorized to perform an exorcism on the plaintiff."

He said the plaintiff "contacted our diocesan victim assistance office in 2010 and the diocese informed the Diocese of Palm Beach of the allegations of abuse within two days."

Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito of Palm Beach said in a 2011 letter to priests of the diocese that Father Euteneuer "has been undergoing intensive evaluation and counseling to address admitted inappropriate crossing of adult heterosexual boundaries."

"While committed to Father Euteneuer's healing, I truly regret and apologize for the hurt and harm which his actions have caused," the bishop said, asking for prayers for the healing of the priest and those affected by his actions.

"Please also pray that this matter will not adversely affect the good which Father Euteneuer's ministry for respect for life, especially on behalf of the unborn, has accomplished," he added.

Bishop Barbarito said no determination had been made "as to when and under what circumstances he may return to ministry."

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