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A history of sex abuse

Gallup Diocese hit with another clergy abuse lawsuit

By Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola
Independent correspondent

GALLUP — The Diocese of Gallup has been named as a defendant in another clergy abuse lawsuit.

The lawsuit, filed in Coconino County Superior Court in Flagstaff, Ariz. (CV2010-00713), centers on allegations of sexual abuse committed by longtime Diocese of Gallup

priest Clement A. Hageman. In 2005 the late Bishop Donald E. Pelotte called two priests — James M. Burns and Hageman — two of the “most abusive priests in the diocese” during a special healing Mass held for victims. Hageman died in 1975 and Burns died in August of this year.

Robert E. Pastor and José de Jesus Rivera, attorneys with Haralson Miller Pitt Feldman & McAnally, filed the lawsuit on behalf of a 70-

year-old Phoenix-area man who grew up in Holbrook and who alleges he was sexually abused as a boy in the 1950s by Hageman. The legal complaint outlines a number of specific acts of sexual abuse the plaintiff, Hageman’s former altar boy, claims he was subjected to by the priest.

In addition to the Gallup Diocese, the law-

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suit names the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Holbrook's Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, and Hageman's estate as defendants.

The lawsuit contains a number of detailed allegations about Hageman that, if true, begin to fill in big gaps of missing information about Hageman's life and his numerous priestly assignments and reassignments in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

"We intend to prove each and every allegation in that complaint," Pastor said when contacted on Thursday. Pastor, the lead attorney, said the plaintiff made the decision to file the lawsuit because of the damage the sexual abuse has caused in his personal life and the plaintiff's desire to reveal the truth of Hageman's decades-long sexual abuse.

According to allegations in the lawsuit, Hageman's sexual abuse of boys was first documented in the 1930s after Hageman was ordained a priest on June 10, 1930, in the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Texas. The lawsuit alleges:

- By 1939, the Rev. Daniel Laning, the pastor of St. Peter's Catholic Church in Laredo, Texas, informed the bishop of the Diocese of Corpus Christi that Hageman had sexually abused boys, and Laning urged Hageman request assignment to a monastery for the balance of his life or to request secularization.

- In 1939, Bishop Emmanuel Ledvina of the Corpus Christi Diocese "banished" Hageman from the diocese.

- Hageman then requested permission to serve in the Alexian Brother's hospital in Oshkosh, Wis., but Hageman was denied after Ledvina warned the Alexian Brothers about him.

- Hageman then attempted to serve as a priest in the Diocese of Hartford, Conn. Ledvina warned the Connecticut bishop that Hageman couldn't return to the two cities he had previously worked at because he might experience "bodily violence from outraged parents."

- In November 1940, Archbishop Rudolf A. Gerken of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe assigned Hageman to the mission at Smith Lake in the newly created Diocese of Gallup.

- On Aug. 1, 1942, Bishop Bernard T. Espelage, the first bishop of the Gallup Diocese, assigned Hageman to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Holbrook, Ariz.

- In October 1952, a group of men from the Holbrook church "confronted Hageman and accused him of sexually abusing boys in the parish." They also informed the Gallup bishop of their allegations. Hageman allegedly admitted he was "imprudent" in dealings with boys.

After the Diocese of Gallup released Hageman's name as a credibly accused pedophile priest in 2005, the Gallup Independent researched Hageman's assignment history in the diocese. According to the Official Catholic Directory, Hageman left Holbrook by 1953 and was reassigned to St. Mary's parish in Kingman, Ariz., where he worked until 1963. In 1964, Hageman is listed as "Absent on Leave," a term which was frequently used in the directory when a priest was sent to a treatment facility. When Hageman returned to the diocese, he spent a year in Camp Verde, Ariz., before being assigned to

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Winslow, where he worked until his death in 1975. The Independent also contacted the Diocese of Corpus Christi to inquire whether any allegations of sexual abuse had been made against Hageman there. Grace Rank, the victim assistance coordinator for the Corpus Christi Diocese, told the newspaper there had been no allegations against Hageman.

According to the legal complaint, the plaintiff "began to experience flashback memories of sexual abuse" in July 2007 during a stop in Gallup while returning home from a vacation. He soon began seeing a Phoenix therapist, and through counseling he began to recover memories of his abuse under Hageman.

The complaint states that in September 2009, the plaintiff discovered the defendants had "covered up and deliberately tried to hide and deny the specific incidents of Hageman's sexual abuse, Hageman's history of sexual abuse, and Hageman's propensity for sexual abuse." As a result, the complaint continues, the defendants are "estopped from alleging the statute of limitations as

a defense" in the case "because of their fraud, breach of fiduciary duties, and promises to toll the statute of limitations to investigate and settle the allegations of sexual abuse."

The lawsuit, which includes five counts, requests a jury trial, monetary compensation for the plaintiff, and punitive damages.

Officials with the Diocese of Gallup declined to provide information about how many credible abuse allegations they have received about Hageman.

"On the advice of our attorney, we have no comment at this time," said Lee Lamb, the diocesan spokesman. "We would like to take this opportunity, however, to remind the public of our procedure for reporting abuse. The first thing someone should do when suspecting sexual abuse or misconduct against a minor is to call the police." After the authorities have been contacted, Lamb added, officials with the diocese may be notified.

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