

# Woman alleges seduction by 7 priests

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A Carson woman, who says she had ambitions to become a nun, has sued the Roman Catholic Church for \$15 million, alleging she was sexually seduced by seven priests while a teen-ager and had a baby by one of them.

The case alleges a conspiracy of sexual misconduct that started at St. Philomena Church in Carson and ended in the Philippines, where the woman was sent by a clergyman to have the child.

The woman, Rita Milla, 22, further alleges she told two Catholic bishops about her plight, but they did nothing about it, and that one priest suggested she have an abortion.

Her lawsuit was filed Wednesday in Los Angeles Superior Court against seven priests and the Los Angeles Archdiocese of the Catholic Church.

Named as defendants were the **Revs. Santiago Tamayo** of St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Wilmington; Angel Cruces of Santa Paula; Henry Caboang, whose parish is in Los Angeles; Rubin Abaya of New Jersey; and Sylvio Lacar, another Los Angeles priest.

Also sued were the **Revs. Victor Balbin** of the Philippines and Valentine Tugade, whose parish is in Monterey.

All are bound by vows of celibacy as a condition of their ordination in the Catholic Church.

Attorney Gloria Allred, known for her cases involving civil rights and feminist causes, announced the case at a news conference at her Los Angeles office.

The priests named in the lawsuit either declined to comment or could not be reached for interviews. A spokesperson for the Los Angeles Archdiocese said Bishop John Ward could not discuss the case because he was ill with the flu.

A church spokesman for St. Peter and Paul, a predominantly Hispanic congregation of 2,000 in Wilmington, was stunned when he heard of the alleged scandal involving his pastor, Tamayo, known by his congregation as a "very spiritual man."

"I can't believe it," Jim Coop said. "It's his nature to be friendly. His forte is individual relationships, one-on-one relationships. He tends to be a cautious individual."

Tamayo, the only Filipino heading a congregation in the Los Angeles Archdiocese, came to St. Peter and Paul in 1981 when he was transferred from St. Philomena. Coop said Tamayo, who is in his 50s, revived parish life and renewed youth groups and last summer's Festival of Hope.

Tomanyo's first assignment after coming to the United States was at Mary Star of the Sea in San Pedro, where he served from 1968 to 1973.

The seductions allegedly began in 1978 at St. Philomena in Carson when Milla was 16. The girl says she was a regular



AP photo by Reed Saxon

Attorney Gloria Allred, left, announced Wednesday that she has filed a \$15 million lawsuit on behalf of Rita Milla, 22, right, who allegedly was seduced

by seven Catholic priests and had given birth to a child by one of them. A photo of 15-month-old Jacqueline Milla was displayed at news conference.

at the church, sang in the choir and helped teach religion to children.

Milla says she admired and respected the priests, and took confession from Tamayo, who was then assigned to St. Philomena. As she got to know Tamayo, he allegedly made sexual advances toward her in a private room at the rear of the church and took her to his brother's apartment.

The lawsuit claims that during Milla's confessions, Tamayo would reach through a broken screen of the confessional and fondle her.

Starting in January 1980, Allred alleges, Tamayo introduced her to Cruces and then five other priests. All supposedly had sexual relations with her during the next two years.

Milla contends Tamayo was her spiritual adviser and convinced her it would help the priests if she would have sex with them.

"He told me sex was something God gave us, and that it was OK," Milla alleged. "I looked up to him. He was a figure of authority and trust."

The lawsuit claims that almost two years after the alleged incidents began, Milla had sexual relations with Tugade and Caboang on the same day in the church rectory. As a result, Allred

claims, Milla became pregnant.

Milla says she does not know which priest impregnated her. But the lawsuit could eventually force Tugade and Caboang into taking paternity tests in an attempt to find out.

According to the case, when Milla told Tamayo she was pregnant, he suggested an abortion, which the Catholic Church traditionally has opposed.

Later, he allegedly came up with a plan to send Milla to the Philippines, where she could have the baby and make arrangements to leave the child behind when she returned to the United States.

Tamayo, the lawsuit contends, told Milla's mother that her daughter was going abroad to study medicine.

Milla claims she went to the Philippines and received little more than \$450 in support from Tamayo during her seven months of pregnancy there.

Milla had her child, Jacqueline, in October 1982. She claims she almost died during the Caesarean delivery.

The lawsuit alleges that while she was in the hospital recovering, a Filipino bishop heard about her problems, went to see her and promised to help. But nothing apparently was done.

Six months later, she allegedly went

to Bishop Ward in Los Angeles and told him that her baby's father was a Catholic priest and that other clergymen had seduced her.

Allred claims Ward said he would look into it, but ultimately told her there was nothing he could do.

Since her return to the United States, Milla and the child have lived with her parents and Milla has been under psychiatric care. It was her therapist that advised her to seek legal help.

"I couldn't talk about it," she said. "All the time I would try and start to tremble. I was always nervous. I thought I was going to have a breakdown."

Allred claims that if the case goes to trial, she is prepared to present the testimony of Milla's therapists and results from a lie detector test that indicates she is telling the truth.

Also, she claims she has evidence showing that one priest named in the case came to Milla and asked for forgiveness.

Allred declined to name the priest, however.

Milla and her parents, seeking support for the child from the Catholic Church, are suing for \$10 million in punitive damages and \$5 million in general damages.