

CALIFORNIA

Priest in Sex Scandal Was Advised to Stay Out of U.S. : Religion: Letters from L.A. archdiocese urged him to remain in Philippines after lawsuit was filed against him.

By **PATT MORRISON**

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TIMES STAFF WRITER

A series of letters reveal that the Los Angeles Roman Catholic archdiocese advised a priest to stay out of the country after a lawsuit was filed against him, the

church and six other priests by a young parishioner who alleged that the priests seduced her and got her pregnant.

The correspondence on archdiocese letterheads shows that Father Santiago (Henry) Tamayo also received monthly payments equal to a priest's salary for much of the time he was living in his native Philippines.

While church officials were corresponding with the priest, they were declining to reveal his whereabouts to an attorney for the woman who was attempting to prosecute her lawsuit.

The letters and interviews shed new light on the scandal involving seven priests, which rocked the archdiocese when it emerged seven years ago.

Tamayo, 56, a Philippine-born U.S. citizen recently suspended from the priesthood because he had married, confirmed the substance of charges made in 1984 by Rita Milla, now 29, who said she had a child by one of seven priests who had sex with her as a teen-ager.

The \$21-million suit alleging conspiracy, fraud and

clergy malpractice was dismissed after the state Supreme Court ruled that the church was not responsible for unauthorized sex acts of its priests and that too much time had passed before the filing of the suit.

A separate paternity suit is still unresolved, but it is agreed by all parties that Tamayo, who admits to having sex with Milla, is not the father. Three years ago, after Milla dropped a slander suit against a bishop, the church set up a \$20,000 trust fund for her daughter, which according to a church lawyer was not an admission of liability but an act of benevolence for the child.

At the time the fraud and malpractice suit was filed, church officials would say only that the priests were no longer with the archdiocese, and would not provide information on their whereabouts, according to Milla's attorney, Gloria Allred, who said that being able to question the priests was crucial to her lawsuit.

Tamayo said in an interview that he felt the archdiocese helped itself by letting the scandal die down, sending him money while he was living abroad and advising him not to return to Los

Angeles, where he inevitably would have been questioned.

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Among the correspondence Tamayo made available to The Times:

* A 1984 archdiocese letter, a copy of which was sent to the now-deceased Cardinal Timothy Manning, enclosing a \$375 check, the first of numerous monthly payments, and asking Tamayo “that you do not reveal that you are being paid by the Los Angeles Archdiocese unless requested under oath.”

* A 1987 archdiocese letter acknowledging Tamayo’s request to return from the Philippines but advising him to find a position there. “Given all that has taken place, (returning) does not seem advisable, and all the advisers to the Archdiocese counsel

against it for the foreseeable future. Our lawyers also inform us that you are liable to personal suits arising out of your past actions. . . . Such suits can only open old wounds and further hurt anyone concerned, including the Archdiocese.”

* A 1988 archdiocese letter written after Tamayo, ignoring the church’s request, had returned to California with his daughter by another woman. “I advised you to settle elsewhere. . . . I cannot emphasize too strongly that there has been no change in the situation. Therefore I am requesting that you return to the Philippines promptly.”

The letters were signed by the ranking churchmen responsible for dealing with the clergy.

Tamayo, once a popular South Bay parish priest, said he came forward after seven years because “I want to keep my conscience clear. . . . It took off a whole lot from my shoulders.” When he got a letter in December saying that because he had married he was suspended from the priesthood, Tamayo said, “It was time to come out.”

Milla, whose daughter is 8 years old, said, “I do admire (Tamayo) for having the courage to come out

and say the truth, and I wish the church were as courageous as he is.

“The church is the one that covered everything up and they were the ones that had power to make things better and they didn’t use it,” she said. “I’d like to hear them say that they messed up and want to make it up.”

In an interview, archdiocese officials and attorneys agreed that the church knew Tamayo was in the Philippines for several years, including while Milla’s attorney was trying to serve him legal papers.

They said it was Tamayo’s decision to go to the Philippines, but acknowledged that they thought it best that he stay there, not only because of the sex scandal but because his family wanted him close by after he suffered two strokes.

“I could see that it was in no one’s best interest for him to return here,” said attorney John P. McNicholas. “He could add or subtract nothing from the litigation. . . . All that could happen is that his return would open old wounds . . . and just be a fertile source of sensationalism.”

Church spokesman Father Gregory Coiro said the archdiocese also wanted Tamayo to stay abroad out of concern for its members

“When people see their priest being accused of some sort of misconduct, there’s a great deal of hurt among many many people. . . . We’re not in the business of hurting people, we’re in the business of healing people. This would not have been a healing move to have these (priests) coming back here.”

As for the monthly payments, they did not amount to hush money but rather were legally mandated until Tamayo found another position, said Father Timothy Dyer, the recently appointed vicar for clergy. Although it was “very unusual (for the payments) to go on that long,” he said, they were sent “out of compassion and care and a sense of moral responsibility for a man who had served us.”

The admonition that Tamayo not talk about the payments except under oath was “just common sense,” said Dyer, because in casual reference it might look like “well, maybe we’re keeping him quiet, we’re paying him to keep quiet. But that wasn’t the reason to do it.”

McNicholas said it was Tamayo who took advantage of the church, fathering a child eight years ago while he was pastor of a Wilmington parish, then coming back in 1988 against the archdiocese's advice, accepting its checks long after he married the child's mother in 1988.

“Here's a man who has betrayed himself, his church, and a few other people, and now says, ‘They made me do it.’ Now wait a minute. Where is the truth here?” McNicholas said.

The genesis of the scandal began in 1978, when Tamayo, who said he was frustrated in his parish work, began an affair with Milla, then 16. By 1981, when Tamayo got his own parish in Wilmington, he said he had ended his affair but that his friends, six Filipino priests, were pursuing their own.

Tamayo got Milla a job answering phones in the rectory after her father fell ill. The priests saw her when they visited Tamayo and sometimes had sex with her there, he alleged.

“I introduced her to them; maybe I was guilty of that, but I didn't put any shackles on her and tell her to have sex with everybody.”

Once, Tamayo found the other priests “laughing” about their affairs. “I felt so bad, I said, ‘Why did you have to do that?’ ”

In early 1982, about the time Tamayo had begun a relationship with another woman who would give birth to Tamayo’s daughter, Milla became pregnant by one of the other priests.

“I asked them who was the father and they just laughed,” recalled Tamayo. “I was so mad. ‘Own up and maybe marry Rita or do something about it,’ I told them. . . . Why somebody who is preaching justice and all this kind of thing would just back out . . . they weren’t going to do anything about it.”

Tamayo said he arranged for Milla to fly to the Philippines and give birth in his brother’s medical clinic. Several Tamayo relatives stood as sponsors at the baby’s baptism.

After Milla went to the archdiocese in July, 1983, asking for child support and asking that the priests be “punished,” the seven clergymen were questioned by church officials, Tamayo said. “We told them everything.” All seven, he said, returned to their parishes. “I didn’t hear any kind of reprimand.”

Exactly how and when the priests left the archdiocese is a subject of dispute.

Archdiocese attorney McNicholas said he was told the seven “panicked and left” as soon as they heard about a press conference by Allred in February, 1984. He said the archdiocese only kept track of Tamayo, the only one assigned to the archdiocese. If Milla’s attorneys had pursued all legal options, he said, documents showing his whereabouts “would have been produced.”

Tamayo and a former archdiocese employee recall it differently.

A former archdiocese spokesman, who asked not to be named, said word of the impending lawsuit reached Msgr. Benjamin Hawkes, now dead.

“He was absolutely infuriated. He got on the phone and told the priests to get out of town right away,” he recalled. “It was fairly clear knowledge among the rest of the clergy that almost by the time Allred had her press conference, they were already out or on their way out of the archdiocese. They were just gone.

“I think they had a big mess on their hands,” he said. “It would have been a scandal, no more or less, than if they had been honest, right from the start. . . . If (the priests) had been able to come out and be straightforward from the beginning, then you wouldn’t have it coming out in seven or eight years, like it is now.”

Tamayo said some of the priests went to his parents’ home in Los Angeles. “I called up (then-chancellor Msgr. John) Rawden. I said, what will I do now? He said, ‘Don’t go back to the parish, there’s a lot of TV people there.’”

Tamayo said he flew to Hawaii and called Rawden.

“He said, ‘It’s good you’re in Hawaii because the bishop over there, the chancellor, is a good friend, so maybe they can give you a job there.’ I had no inclination to do that--I’d worked here all my life.”

Rawden could not be reached for comment.

Tamayo said he returned briefly to Los Angeles, talked to the other priests about a defense, then decided to fly to the Philippines.

In the seven years since the affair surfaced, a change

at the top of the archdiocese--from Manning to Archbishop Roger Mahony--has made for some differences. One is that procedures for handling such incidents have been established.

“If somebody gets into trouble, we don’t take over responsibility, but he does,” Dyer said. Counseling and therapy may be provided to the priest, and if they are needed for “someone who was victimized or hurt . . . that’s the priest’s responsibility” to pay for it. So is child support.

“I don’t want to contrast this administration, to say we rode in on a white horse and changed everything, because that’s not true,” Dyer said. “I don’t want to place any judgment on the past, on the way things were done.”

“There were no winners in that case, no winners at all,” McNicholas said. “The child lost, Rita lost, my client lost, the priest lost. There were no winners, only losers.”

Community correspondent Janet Barker contributed to this article.

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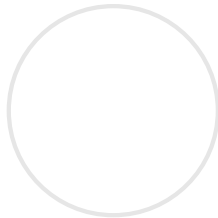
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