

Man says diocese knew about accusations months before acting

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — An East Tennessee man says the Catholic Diocese of Knoxville knew about abuse allegations against a music teacher nearly a year before it took action against him.

Michael Boyd said he told church officials he had been abused by William Lovelace in August 2018. But diocese spokesman Jim Wogan said the bishop only learned of the accusations when Boyd sued the diocese last July. The competing claims were first reported by the [Chattanooga Times Free Press](#).

A woman who answered the phone at a number listed for a William Lovelace in Knoxville refused to comment.

Boyd, in a telephone interview, said Lovelace tried to get Boyd to touch him inappropriately when Boyd was a boy, allegations that were outlined in the July lawsuit. The lawsuit also said Boyd was abused by a priest and a bishop, both of whom have since died.

Soon after the suit was filed, the diocese suspended Lovelace with “a presumption of innocence” until the allegations could be investigated.

Two months later, Lovelace was terminated without the option to rehire. The diocese said the termination was for “contract issues unrelated to the lawsuit,” the Chattanooga Times Free Press reported.

Boyd said he told church officials about Lovelace when he first approached them with his abuse allegations a year earlier, in August 2018. At the time, Boyd did not realize Lovelace was still working in the diocese, he said.

In response to Boyd’s allegations, the diocese hired an outside investigator sometime in the fall or winter of 2018. The investigator found Boyd’s claims not credible, the diocese has said, although the investigator did not interview Boyd.

In a written statement Friday, Bishop Richard Stika defended the way the diocese handled Boyd’s allegations.

“When information was presented to us, and personnel decisions were warranted, we took firm and prudent action, which included the immediate suspension and eventual termination of a teacher,” Stika wrote. “We have been open and honest with Mr. Boyd and his representatives, and we will maintain our pledge to be transparent with the

media and the public, despite a campaign by at least one zealous activist organization that seems fixated on unfairly discrediting us.”

Susan Vance, of the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, said the diocese is trying to have it both ways, claiming they did a thorough investigation while also claiming to not have known about the allegations against Lovelace.

“Their contention that they knew nothing about Lovelace ... is a flat-out lie,” Vance said.

The diocese reached a settlement with Boyd for \$100,000 in mid-November, the Times Free Press reported. In announcing the settlement, the diocese said again that it found no validity to Boyd’s claims. However, it said that “further pursuing this matter through the legal system could be time-consuming, costly, and detrimental to (the church’s) mission of service.”

The Associated Press generally does not name people who say they were sexually abused, but Boyd agreed to be identified.