

## Documents contradict Knoxville diocese's timeline of knowing about sexual abuse allegations against priests and teacher

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*CORRECTION: A previous version of this story was edited on Friday, Jan. 17, 2019, at 1:32 p.m., to clarify that Pam Bernards no longer works as the director of professional development for the National Catholic Education Association.*

After months of publicly discrediting and denying sexual abuse allegations against prominent priests and a diocesan employee, documents obtained by the Times Free Press suggest the Diocese of Knoxville may have known about those allegations for almost a year before suspending the accused employee.

In December, the diocese settled a July lawsuit by East Tennessee resident Michael Boyd alleging he was repeatedly sexually abused by Monsignor Francis Xavier Mankel, Bishop Anthony O'Connell, visiting priests and diocesan employee William Michael Lovelace. The abuse allegedly occurred between 1991 and 1995 when Boyd was a preteen student at Sacred Heart Cathedral School in Knoxville.

Information gathered from a variety of documents — including a copy of the lawsuit, a police report, multiple diocese releases and Boyd's 18-page, handwritten statement given to police— create a timeline that contradicts the diocese's claims of not knowing about abuse allegations made against Lovelace until summer 2019.

The documents point to Lovelace being identified in the summer of 2018 and being allowed to have contact with children for another school year.

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The diocese maintains its position made in previous statements and its timeline of events, said Jim Wogan, communications director for the diocese.

In August 2018, Boyd went to the diocese with the allegations after learning Lovelace was again working for the diocese as a music teacher. With the support of the state chapter of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, Boyd filed a report with the Knoxville Police Department in September 2018, although the criminal statute of limitations for the alleged crime had passed. Around this time, the diocese said it hired an "independent and highly qualified criminal defense attorney" to review Boyd's claims, according to multiple statements released by the diocese.

The diocese said it turned over all the materials Boyd gave it to the investigator. What materials the diocese had remains unclear. No one from the diocese talked with Boyd about the allegations, Boyd said in an interview. The investigator hired by the diocese also never questioned Boyd, he said.

Asked about this, Wogan said the diocese's investigator spoke with Boyd before Jan. 11, 2019, but, because Boyd had an attorney at the time, the investigator said they could not talk unless the attorney was present. There were no other conversations between the investigator and Boyd, Wogan said. The diocese has said repeatedly in statements the investigator, who was not named, found no credibility to Boyd's claims.

When [Boyd filed his lawsuit](#) nearly a year later, in July 2019, the diocese said the lawsuit contained "additional information, including the name of an employee of the diocese, not part of the original allegations." In another release two months later, the diocese said there were multiple new names and allegations. However, all of the names and allegations included in the lawsuit appear in Boyd's 18-page handwritten statement given to the Knoxville Police Department in September 2018.

Full statement from the Diocese of Knoxville, made by Jim Wogan on Jan 10:

The Diocese of Knoxville stands by the statement(s) it has made regarding Mr. Boyd's allegations. At no time before August 2019 did Mr. Boyd make known to us his accusations against Mr. Lovelace. When these accusations were brought to our attention in 2019, the Diocese of Knoxville acted promptly by first suspending Mr. Lovelace, then initiating an investigation of the claims, and then eventually terminating his contract for issues that were found to be unrelated to the lawsuit. The Diocese of Knoxville has tried to act in an honest and open manner with the media and the public. In this case, the Diocese was under no legal obligation to reveal the settlement of the lawsuit. We did so because we felt it was the right thing to do.

The diocese said it never received a copy of the police report. However, Boyd said he provided all the names in the handwritten statement to the victims' assistance coordinator for the diocese when he first approached the diocese nearly a year earlier, in 2018.

The diocese suspended Lovelace in 2019 as soon as it became aware of the accusations and stands by its timeline of events of not knowing about any accusations before that, Wogan said in a statement.

"At no time before August 2019 did Mr. Boyd make known to us his accusations against Mr. Lovelace," the statement said, in part. "When these accusations were brought to our attention in 2019, the Diocese of Knoxville acted promptly by first suspending Mr. Lovelace, then initiating an investigation of the claims, and then eventually terminating his contract for issues that were found to be unrelated to the lawsuit."

When Boyd's lawsuit was filed, the diocese announced it suspended Lovelace from his position as a music teacher at two unnamed Catholic schools. In the 11 months between when Boyd brought his allegations to the church and when his lawsuit was filed, Lovelace was listed as the church choir director in the Sunday bulletin of Holy Ghost Catholic Church, which is connected to St. Joseph School in Knoxville. Lovelace had been recently hired to teach at St. Mary's School in Oak Ridge. He had also taught students at Maryville City Schools.

According to [the Catholic Church's charter on addressing abuse](#) passed in 2002, a priest or any other church employee facing credible abuse allegations should be removed from ministry or any other church function.

In September, the diocese said Lovelace's contract with the diocese was permanently terminated without the opportunity for rehire but denied the termination was connected with Boyd's lawsuit. Unlike other statements related to the lawsuit, this announcement was never posted to the diocese's official website, but instead appeared on a parish website.

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The church's claim that there were new names and allegations in the lawsuit fits a pattern of misrepresentation and shows a lack of concern for abuse victims, said Susan Vance, founder of Tennessee's SNAP. The diocese's hiring of a private investigator who drew conclusions without speaking to the person who made the allegations shows the Catholic Church only follows policies that serve its self-interest, she said.

"From day one, the statements of the Diocese of Knoxville in regard to Michael Boyd have been full of inconsistencies and outright lies," Vance said. "... This is an affront to every victim and every parent who trusts the Catholic Church to protect our children. There is no justice here."

The diocese did not encourage Boyd to go to the police, despite what it claimed in multiple statements, she said. Instead, Vance encouraged Boyd to file the police report and accompanied him when he did.

A non-disparagement clause in the settlement bars Boyd from speaking negatively about the diocese. He said he did not bring his lawsuit because he wanted money.

"I wanted to tell my story," Boyd said. "I want to know that this cannot happen to another child here. That's what I want. I want that assurance."

The ongoing story of Boyd's case continues the controversy surrounding how the Catholic Church handled its sexual abuse crisis revealed almost 20 years ago. In August 2018, a Pennsylvania grand jury released a report detailing the systematic abuse of children by hundreds of priests in the state. Other states, including New York, Virginia and Nebraska, are working on their own investigations.

According to the lawsuit, the alleged abuse occurred after Boyd, who was 10 years old at the time, transferred to Sacred Heart Cathedral School.

Boyd had previously confessed to church leaders that he was being abused at home, and the lawsuit alleged Mankel and other priests used that information to take advantage of the child. The lawsuit alleged Mankel subjected Boyd to what the priest called "love therapy," which the priest said would help him deal with the abuse at home. The "therapy" included having the boy flex for him, dirty jokes, fondling and the priest putting his penis against the boy's back. The lawsuit alleged the diocese knew of another instance of abuse in the church in 1984 that Mankel helped conceal.

Mankel made Boyd promise not to tell anyone about what was happening. When Boyd told his gym coach Pam Bernards, she told Boyd he was lying and such lies would likely close the school and his parents would become unemployed and homeless, the lawsuit stated. In 1992, Bernards was promoted to principal of the school.

Boyd also allegedly was abused by Bishop O'Connell and visiting priests, whom the lawsuit said brought gifts for Mankel. The school music teacher, Lovelace, was also accused of guiding Boyd's hand down his pants during a music lesson.

The abuse and subsequent concealment of abuse by the Catholic Church resulted in severe psychological damage to Boyd, according to the lawsuit.

Mankel, who died in 2017 at age 81, helped found the Diocese of Knoxville in 1988. He had served in churches and schools across Tennessee, including in Memphis, Knoxville, Gatlinburg and Lawrenceburg.

O'Connell, who died in 2012 at age 73, served as the first bishop of Knoxville and resigned as the bishop of Palm Beach, Florida in 2002 after admitting to abusing children in multiple states during his time as a priest.

Bernards, who was accused in the lawsuit of covering up the sexual abuse at Sacred Heart Cathedral School in the 1990s, served as director of professional development for the National Catholic Education Association until August 2019, according to a spokeswoman. Bernards' departure came several weeks after being named in Boyd's lawsuit.

[\(READ MORE: Knoxville diocese announces settlement in sexual abuse case\)](#)

Boyd's lawsuit claimed the priests and diocesan employees worked together to facilitate the grooming and abuse, as well as to cover it up. In mid-November, Boyd and the diocese reached a financial settlement of \$100,000 over the lawsuit.

"The Diocese of Knoxville has tried to act in an honest and open manner with the media and the public," Wogan said in his statement on behalf of the diocese. "In this case, the Diocese was under no legal obligation to reveal the settlement of the lawsuit. We did so because we felt it was the right thing to do."

The diocese [announced the settlement](#) on the final day of 2019, nearly six weeks after it was signed. In the announcement, the church maintained its denial of the validity of Boyd's claim and said if the lawsuit went to trial it would be "detrimental to [the church's] mission of service."

"The people in the Church and the public in general need to wake up to the double-speak of the Bishop and the diocese of Knoxville," Vance said. "Why do we accept what they say without question? The diocese should be investigated for their cover-up."

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