



For Immediate Release
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Lawsuit Alleges Nashville Diocese Failed to Stop Rape of Child from 2014–2017

NASHVILLE—A lawsuit filed Monday night alleges that the Catholic Diocese of Nashville and St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church knowingly failed to stop a director of religious education from repeatedly raping and sexually exploiting a child on church property from 2014–2017. The alleged perpetrator, Michael D. Lewis, faces trial in February 2022 in Rutherford County on felony sex crimes charges related to this abuse.

Allegations in the lawsuit

The Diocese employed Lewis, now 43, as Director of Religious Education at St. Rose, in Murfreesboro. Plaintiff, who has filed this lawsuit under the pseudonym Jane Doe to protect her privacy, was a parishioner, student, and dedicated volunteer at St. Rose.

Lewis “groomed” Jane Doe for abuse beginning in the fall of 2013 by ingratiating himself as a father figure. He began sexually abusing Jane Doe in 2014, when she was 13. Lewis raped and sexually exploited Plaintiff in the St. Rose church building and parish offices, among other locations.

The defendants knew of Lewis’s alarming and inappropriate conduct with Jane Doe through numerous verbal and written complaints from parishioners and staff from 2013–2016. As these witnesses reported, Lewis repeatedly took Jane Doe to isolated locations at St. Rose and inappropriately touched her in public. Yet the defendants merely gave Lewis token reminders to follow Diocesan policies, which Lewis said he would ignore. Lewis continued to abuse Plaintiff through 2017.

In 2020, a grand jury indicted Lewis on felony sex crimes charges related to the abuse, after Jane Doe courageously came forward. The Diocese has repeatedly and falsely claimed it had no warning the abuse would occur.¹

Statement by Jane Doe's lead counsel

“The allegations in this lawsuit raise disturbing questions about the Diocese of Nashville’s commitment to protect children from being terrorized by its employees,” said Patrick A. Thronson, an attorney in the Janet, Janet & Suggs Sexual Abuse Division who is representing Jane Doe. “As the complaint alleges, the Diocese received numerous eyewitness reports of Lewis’s flagrantly inappropriate conduct, yet knowingly failed to act. As a result, Plaintiff suffered in silence as Lewis raped her for years at her own church.”

The case number for the lawsuit is 21C1675. The complaint is available on request.

About Janet, Janet & Suggs, LLC

The Sexual Abuse Division of Janet, Janet & Suggs has represented hundreds of men and women across the nation who were abused as children by trusted authority figures, and has represented thousands of men and women who were sexually abused as adults. Among many notable cases, the firm represented 139 survivors of sexual abuse by Dr. George Tyndall in litigation that produced an unprecedented \$842.4 million settlement against the University of Southern California.

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¹ See, e.g., <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2020/06/30/murfreesboro-churchs-former-sunday-school-director-indicted-rape-sexual-battery-authority-figure/5350991002/>; <https://tennesseeregister.com/former-st-rose-staffer-indicted-on-sex-abuse-charges/>.