

# Allentown Diocese removes monsignor, alerts authorities of sex abuse allegation



Monsignor Francis A. Nave of Sacred Heart parish in Bath has been removed from ministry as police investigate a sex abuse allegation from 2011.

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**T**he pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Bath encouraged a teen he was counseling via online video to take his clothes off and perform sex acts, a lawsuit filed Tuesday in Philadelphia alleges.

The suit charges that Monsignor Francis Nave persuaded the boy, who was 16 when the online counseling sessions began in 2011, to disrobe and commit sex acts.

In a statement Wednesday, the Allentown Diocese said it was unaware of the allegations or the lawsuit before hearing about them from The Morning Call. Afterward, it said, it contacted law enforcement and removed Nave from ministry, pending the result of an investigation.

Nave could not be reached for comment. His accuser is anonymous, identified as John Doe in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit comes as Catholics across the state await the findings of a grand jury investigation into **decades of abuse** allegations in six of the state's eight dioceses, including Allentown. The report was to have been released before the end of June, but **was held up** when the state Supreme Court put the brakes on its release last week as it **reviews the steps taken to compile it**. It is not clear when — or if — it will be unveiled.

Jeff Herman, the Boca Raton, Fla., attorney representing Nave's accuser, said the timing of the lawsuit is not related to the grand jury report.

"For him, it was just time to come forward," Herman said, adding that Nave's accuser was fearful that other children would be harmed if he remained silent.

"He felt completely used and hurt. He has been struggling with this. He hopes that coming forward will help him cope and prevent others from being hurt," Herman said.

The alleged abuse was also reported to local law enforcement in Suffolk, Va., where Nave's accuser, now 23, lives, Herman said. Northampton County District Attorney John Morganelli did not respond to messages Wednesday.

According to the suit, Nave's accuser was a 16-year-old boy who had suffered physical and emotional abuse, had low self-esteem and was confronting issues regarding his sexuality. He sought support on a gay social media website and received a message from Nave. The boy told Nave his age and the two exchanged cellphone numbers and began communicating by calls and text messages.

Nave told the boy that as a Catholic priest it was his job to help people and listen to their problems, the suit says. He told the boy that he was a skilled counselor and offered to help him deal with his issues.

Through intimate and personal conversations in which the priest told the boy he wanted to be his friend, Nave groomed the boy sexually, the suit alleges. He asked sexually explicit questions, according to the lawsuit, and told the boy that he was masturbating during their conversations.

After proposing that he and the boy communicate through video conferencing apps such as Skype or Facetime, the suit says, Nave conducted the video sessions from his room in the rectory while the boy was in his Virginia home.

As Nave and the boy spoke on video, the lawsuit claims, Nave instructed the boy to remove his clothes and masturbate on camera. The suit says Nave told the boy this was part of his counseling and that it would help him cope with his issues.

The suit alleges Nave used his influence to persuade the boy to engage in other sexually explicit conduct during their video counseling sessions. According to the lawsuit, the sessions occurred on multiple occasions when the boy was 16 and 17 years old.

The boy captured some of the images from those sessions in screen grabs, Herman said.

The sessions lasted about a year before the boy became frustrated and stopped communicating with Nave, Herman said.

“He was contacted again over the years but he has not wanted to have conversation with [Nave],” Herman said.

The suit names Nave, the Diocese of Allentown and Bishop Alfred A. Schlert as defendants and seeks compensatory and punitive damages and other costs.

Herman said he has a national law practice representing victims of sexual abuse. He said he filed the lawsuit in Philadelphia County Court because the Allentown Diocese conducts business in Philadelphia, which gives courts there jurisdiction to hear the case.

Nave, originally from Hamburg, was ordained a priest in the Allentown Diocese in 1992 and was elevated to monsignor in 2008. According to The Morning Call archives, he has served as director of the diocese’s Office of Vocations and Office of Permanent Diaconate. He also worked with Catholic Social Agency and was an assistant pastor at Ss. Simon and Jude in Bethlehem before becoming pastor at Sacred Heart in Bath in 2008.

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