

NOWCAST

Watch on Demand ▶



88°

BREAKING NEWS:

< 2 / 7 > ||

WDSU Day of Giving raising money for Hurricane Laura relief



☰ SHOW TRANSCRIPT

SIGN UP FOR BREAKING NEWS



Get local stories sent straight to your inbox as news breaks.

Your Email Address	SUBMIT
--------------------	--------

[Privacy Notice](#)

Archdiocese adds priest to list of those accused of abuse



Updated: 3:55 PM CDT Aug 20, 2020

Infinite Scroll Enabled



Greg LaRose

Chief Investigative Reporter

NEW ORLEANS — The Archdiocese of New Orleans has added another priest to its list of clergy credibly accused of sexual abuse. Brian Highfill was assigned to five churches in the New Orleans area and one in Houma between 1975 and 1981, when the abuse is alleged to have occurred.

Allegations against Highfill include a relationship with a 10-year-old altar boy in the early 1970s when Highfill was a priest at St. Catherine of Siena in Metairie, according to a civil lawsuit another accuser filed in 2019 against the priest and the archdiocese. The court petition said Highfill “maintained a personal, intimate and improper relationship” with the victim, sending him letters, cards and gifts “that expressed his love, affection and yearning...” for more than 15 years.

The victim took his own life in 1993, according to the lawsuit. Relatives of the victim found Highfill’s cards and letters and brought them to the attention of a monsignor with the Archdiocese of New Orleans within the following year. The monsignor “did not consider the cards and letters to be significant” and no action was taken against Highfill, the court document said.

In August 2018, a family member reached Archbishop Gregory Aymond and brought him Highfill’s cards and letters to the victim, the lawsuit details. After the relative met with Aymond, the court filing said there was no further response from the archdiocese.

The lawsuit only details Highfill's abuse allegations at one church in the New Orleans area. In addition to St. Catherine of Sienna, the archdiocese confirmed Highfill was assigned to Our

Lady of the Rosary in New Orleans, St. Edward the Confessor, St. Ann and St. Francis Xavier in Metairie, and St. Francis de Sales in Houma.

After his assignments to churches in southeast Louisiana, Highfill transferred to the Armed Forces Diocese and was a chaplain at England Air Force Base near Alexandria from 1982 to 1984. He eventually relocated to Las Vegas and continued to serve as a military chaplain, according to the lawsuit.

Church protocol required Aymond to contact the Archdiocese of Las Vegas once accusations against Highfill were made, but the lawsuit said there was no such contact. The Archdiocese of Las Vegas conducted its own investigation based on the information the victim's family shared in September 2018, and the court record shows they found the allegations to be credible. The information was shared with police in Las Vegas.

The lawsuit indicates the Archdiocese of Las Vegas notified Aymond of its findings in October 2018, just before the Archdiocese of New Orleans released its list of credibly accused clergy. Highfill's name wasn't added to the [list](#) until this week. It shows he was removed from the ministry in 2018.

Highfill's name also wasn't on the Archdiocese of Las Vegas' list of credibly accused clergy released in April 2019 and remained a priest at the time the lawsuit was filed, the court record said.

The plaintiff in the lawsuit is identified as A.A. Doe, who encountered Highfill during his time at England Air Force Base. Doe was an Air Force enlistee and devout Catholic who confided with the priest about his faith and past, according to the court complaint.

Highfill invited Doe to stay the night at his home and gave Doe a back rub when the priest said he looked "tense," the lawsuit said. The priest grabbed Doe's testicles while rubbing his back, and the enlistee then stopped going to Highfill's house, the plaintiff claims.

After a couple of weeks, Highfill confronted Doe and asked why he no longer visited his house. Doe told the priests the backrubs made him uncomfortable, and Highfill said he would no longer give them to Doe, the lawsuit said. Doe claims the priest gave him alcohol and "nerve

pills” on subsequent trips to his home. On one visit, Doe said he woke up to find Highfill about to start performing oral sex on him.

Doe was discharged from the Air Force, became “totally disabled” and remained unemployed as a result of Highfill’s sexual abuse, the lawsuit said.

Doe contacted the Archdiocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 2018 with allegations against Highfill, according to the court filing. He was provided medical care and reimbursed for psychological services, but Scranton referred him to the Archdiocese of New Orleans for any additional compensation.

The lawsuit says Scranton notified the Archdiocese of New Orleans of Doe’s allegations before it released its list of credibly accused clergy. It also claims New Orleans church officials possess “a sanctioned investigatory report, additional evidence, and personal attestations of credible claims of sexual abuse by Father Brian Highfill” and “intentionally protected” the priest by not sharing the information with law enforcement.

The court filing said the Archdiocese of New Orleans continued to support Highfill, who’s now approximately 78 years old, through providing him health insurance and retirement benefits.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans issued a statement Wednesday to announce Highfill’s name was being added to its credibly accused clergy list after it had “concluded a thorough investigation into allegations of abuse of minors” lodged against him.

The local archdiocese is currently seeking bankruptcy protection in federal court after settling multiple lawsuits over abuse claims. Doing so would potentially shield the church from future payouts.

Michael Zerlin, a Thibodaux attorney representing Highfill, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

☰ SHOW TRANSCRIPT

