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Guam: Additional Priest, 2 Other Church Members Accused Of Sex Abuse In Growing Scandal

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New bill would end the statute of limitations on lawsuits for victims of child abuse

By Haidee V Eugenio

HAGĀTÑA, Guam (Pacific Daily News, August 2, 2016) – Another former altar boy told senators Monday morning that a priest and two other church members sexually abused him in the 1950s.

He is the fifth person since May to publicly accuse Guam clergy of sexual assault. Three former Agat altar boys since May have accused Archbishop Anthony Apuron of sexually abusing them in the 1970s, when he was parish priest. The mother of a dead former altar boy also has accused Apuron of molesting her son in the 1970s.

Leo B. Tudela, now 73, said he was sexually abused on three separate occasions by three people, including a priest, connected to the Archdiocese of Agana when he came to Guam in 1956.

Tudela testified during a public hearing on a bill that would lift the statute of limitations on civil lawsuits against those who sexually abuse children.

“I have cried on many occasions since then and continue to have memory flashbacks of the horrible things that happened to me,” said Tudela, who broke down several times as he narrated his ordeal. “I feel cheated and molested by people who were supposed to be my protector, comforter and God’s guardian angels.”

The sexual abuse happened after Tudela, who lived in Saipan, was invited to come to Guam to attend Catholic school, he said. He was 13 years old.

He was born and raised in Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and served as an altar boy at Mount Carmel Church in Chalan Kanoa, starting in 1954. Two other boys from Saipan and Tinian were invited to Guam at the time, he said.

Tudela said, while in Guam, he was sexually abused by a church brother — a term referring to a man who is part of a religious community but who’s not ordained — at the Capuchin Fathers Monastery in Agana Heights. He said he remembers him only by the name “Brother Mariano.”

Tudela also said Father Louis Brouillard later abused him at the Santa Teresita Church rectory in Mangilao.

Brouillard, now in Minnesota, was the first pastor at San Isidro Catholic Church of Malojloj in Inarajan when it officially became a parish on July 21, 1973, the Archdiocese’s official newspaper said in a July 5, 2013 edition.

Tudela, now director of the U.S. Postal Service’s Asia-Pacific Relations, said Brouillard and “Brother Mariano” separately roused him from his sleep in the middle of the night or early morning by touching his private parts and told him, “It’s OK.”

“All these evil incidents have stuck in my mind for some 60 years, and, to this day, I still have nightmares and continue to relive those events as if they happened only yesterday,” Tudela said. “Terrible things come to my mind and I really hate Father Louis and Brother Mariano for what they did to me.”

In addition, a Boy Scouts of America scoutmaster, who Tudela said was a “high member of the church” and whom he only remembers by his first name, “Ignacio,” asked him and fellow altar boys to stand in a straight line, take their pants down and masturbate at a Yona Beach.

Tudela said all the boys staying at the Santa Teresita Church rectory were required to join the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts program, he said, was sponsored by the church.

After finishing high school in Guam, Tudela served in the U.S. Army for three years, then studied in California. He began to work for the U.S. Postal Service, starting as a postal assistant while working on his bachelor’s degree, and later while he earned his master’s degree. After building a successful career with the U.S. Postal Service, Tudela was instrumental in developing a post office in Saipan.

Seeking justice

Tudela was among four people who testified Monday morning on Sen. Frank Blas Jr.’s bill, which would lift the time restriction on lawsuits for victims of child abuse. Criminal prosecution is impossible in most cases because of statutes of limitations in effect at the time. The deadline to prosecute offenders expired decades ago, although Guam law recently was changed to eliminate time limits on prosecuting future offenders.

“All I want is justice, due process of the law and the people who did this and condoned these actions to accept responsibility for their evil acts, and to have closure and to start my healing process after over a half century of pain and suffering,” Tudela told senators.

He said for so many years, the Archdiocese of Agana, “appears to have failed to not only stop these incidents, but also tolerated and perpetuated these evil acts upon young innocent boys.”

After the public hearing, Tudela was flanked by his friends and attorney David Lujan, who represents the people who have accused Apuron of sexually

molesting them.

Pope Francis temporarily stripped Apuron of his administrative authority over the Catholic Church in Guam. Archbishop Savio Tai Fai Hon currently runs the archdiocese.

Apuron denied the accusations against him and is not facing any charges.

Monday's public hearing on Bill 326-33 was a continuation of Thursday's hearing, led by Sen. Frank Aguon, chairman of the Legislative Committee on Guam U.S. Military Relocation, Public Safety and Judiciary.

'No' to this bill

The only opposition to substitute Bill 326-33 came from Dr. Zoltan Szekely of Yona. Szekely said he's concerned some details in the bill remain unclear and unexplained, and that the bill might be intended to become "a stepping stone toward making untrue connections to vilify a certain faith group inside the Catholic Church."

Szekely also raised concerns about the testimony of others, but Aguon said Szekely should stick to testifying on the bill.

Another person who testified on Monday, Anthony B. San Nicolas, of Tamuning, the island's former postmaster general, provided senators with a character reference and moral support for Tudela, whom he described as his close and special friend, especially during the time they were working together.

"Our relationship and true friendship that carried us throughout these many years can be attributed to the fact that Leo's integrity and dignity is beyond reproach," San Nicolas said. "Today, we are witnessing Leo courageously decide to open up and come forward to tell us his story about his dreadful and traumatic experience that he encountered regarding child sex abuse during his early age as an altar boy at Mangilao Church."

San Nicolas said Tudela and other accusers are looking for closure by seeking and demanding for their basic right to due process in their quest for justice. He urged passage of the bill.

'Apuron is a serial child molester'

Apuron is a "serial child molester," said Vincent P. Pereda, who has more than 30 years clinical experience as a professional counselor, program manager and clinical administrator.

Pereda resigned in May as a member of the archdiocese review board, saying he believes accusations that Apuron sexually assaulted a minor.

"After hearing all of the accounts of sexual molestation and rape that have been publicly disclosed by the victims that have bravely come forward, I have no doubt that Anthony Apuron can be considered a serial child molester who has perpetrated his criminal sexual conduct behavior undetected and/or unreported over many years," Pereda told senators.

After retiring from the federal and local government, Pereda has continued to work as a part-time counselor for court clients. He works with both juvenile and adult sex offenders, performing clinical evaluations and providing direct treatment intervention.

Pereda said many have referred to Apuron as a pedophile, a sex offender who has a primary interest and sexual attraction to children, as well as a hebephile, a sex offender attracted to adolescents.

"Since Apuron has never been held accountable for any of his sexually illicit acts, we do not know just how far he has gone with additional victims," Pereda said. "It is very possible that in addition to children and adolescents, he may also have continued his sexual deviance with adults."

He noted the statute of limitations prevents criminal prosecution.

"This may be the only course open to child sex abuse victims to finally obtain long awaited and overdue justice. I, therefore, strongly urge the legislature to

expeditiously pass this bill into law," Pereda told senators.

Church mum on bill

Comments on Bill 326-33 will be accepted until late Wednesday afternoon. As of Monday, the Catholic Church or the Archdiocese of Agana has not submitted any comment on the bill.

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