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News

Shocking, graphic suit alleges child abuse over nearly 40 years at Staten Island orphanage

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Mount Loretto, located in Pleasant Plains. (Staten Island Advance file photo)

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- A bombshell lawsuit filed against The Mission of the Immaculate Virgin at Mount Loretto alleges that multiple people endured appalling abuse, over decades, at the hands of nuns, priests and lay employees at the former orphanage.

The lawsuit is one in a flurry filed as the [Child Victims Act](#) took effect Wednesday, [sending shockwaves across Staten Island](#).

The 127-page lawsuit targeting Mount Loretto also names the Archdiocese of New York and several other Catholic entities, and includes seven victims -- one who still lives on Staten Island.

It describes in graphic, disturbing detail allegations of abuse that include a boy raped repeatedly by a priest, a girl who endured near-daily molestation and a number of beatings that landed children in the hospital.

Some of the incidents alleged in the suit date as far back as the 1950s, with the last extending into the early 1990s.

SEXUAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS SPAN DECADES

Ruth Cortes, formerly known as Ruth Foster, alleges that she was abused and molested on an almost daily basis by David Williams, a staff member assigned to her dormitory while she was at the Pleasant Plains mission from 1985 to 1991, according to the lawsuit.

Cortes, who is currently a Staten Island resident, maintains in the suit that Williams forced her to perform oral sex upon him, while he touched and fondled her.

When Cortes attempted to fight back, the lawsuit says that Williams hit her, pushed her against a wall and repeatedly struck her with a broom in her genitals.

The lawsuit claims that when Cortes told supervisors at Mount Loretto about the abuse they did not believe her, and it continued.

Zaida Rivera, who was at Mount Loretto from 1962 to 1966 and was formerly known as Zaida Gonzalez, said that on one occasion a group of four or five nuns surrounded her, forced her to lie down naked and then made an older boy who was naked sexually abuse her, according to the lawsuit.



The nuns then stood around her and laughed, the lawsuit claims.

Rivera, who now resides in Florida, also alleges she suffered sexual abuse at the hands of multiple nuns, according to the lawsuit, who Rivera said would touch and fondle her during "ballet lessons," for which she was frequently held out of school.

John Rodriguez, who was at the mission from 1953 to 1967, was allegedly sexually abused and molested by Father Joseph Ansaldi, Father Eugene Mangan, Father James Keehan, and staff member Bill Finley, as well as other lay counselors, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit says that Rodriguez, a Bronx resident, was molested by Ansaldi, who allegedly fondled Rodriguez and penetrated him.

The abuse began when Rodriguez was approximately 13 years old, according to the lawsuit.

PHYSICAL ABUSE ALSO ALLEGED

Also bringing the lawsuit, Robin Campbell, who was previously known as Robin Miller, alleges that she was physically and emotionally abused on an almost-daily basis by the nuns at Mount Loretto.

The Advance previously reported on Campbell's petition to the court to preserve critical evidence and information and to identify other possible defendants.

In the newly-filed lawsuit, Campbell, who was at the Pleasant Plains mission from 1960 to 1966, says that she was thrown down a flight of stairs, and had her finger broken after a piano cover was closed on them.

Now a Florida resident, Campbell says that the abuse caused her to frequently be sent to the infirmary, the lawsuit alleges.

Theresa Reid, formerly known as Theresa Prince, said that she endured sexual abuse from Sisters Helen, Joachim, Georgine and Father Edmund Fogarty, according to the lawsuit.

Reid, who is a resident of Virginia, maintains that Father Fogarty would force her to have sex, the lawsuit says, beginning when she was approximately 11 years old.

While at the Pleasant Plains mission, Carol Rosa, who was previously known as Carol Roller, alleges in the lawsuit that she was sexually abused by Sister Helen, Sister Juanita, Sister Virginia Marie, and Father Horry, which included "forcible touching" of



her buttocks.

Rosa, who is now a resident of New Jersey, was at Mount Loretto from 1953 to 1967, according to the lawsuit.

Gail Roller, who is now cared for by Rosa and considered disabled, suffered severe physical beatings while she attended Mount Loretto between 1952 and 1955, the lawsuit alleges.

On one occasion, the lawsuit claims that Roller was beaten so severely by Sister Virginia Marie that she went into convulsions and was taken away by ambulance. Even after another nun, Sister Fidelis, asked Sister Marie to stop hitting Roller because she was already convulsing, the beating continued.

ORPHANAGE CLOSED IN MID-90s

Mount Loretto served as a children's shelter beginning in the late 1800s and fostered thousands of children over its 100-plus year history. Many were wards of the court, either orphaned or from broken homes and other dire circumstances.

By 1964, it was the largest child care institution in the U.S. The average stay for most youngsters was three years, but some could spend their entire teenage years at the facility.

The end of foster-care service was announced in 1994. Today, the campus is run by Catholic Charities of Staten Island and is home to two public schools, a senior and a community center, a food pantry and a day care facility.

ARCHDIOCESE FACES SLEW OF SUITS

The Child Victims Act legislation, which was signed into law on Feb. 14 by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, lifts for one year the statute of limitations in New York that, for decades, left victims of old sex abuse crimes powerless.

The influx of litigation began just one minute past midnight, and the Advance reported on multiple lawsuits filed Wednesday against Roman Catholic schools and churches, a youth athletic institution and even one man's parents.

Joseph Zwilling, the director of communication for the Archdiocese, issued the following statement on Wednesday:



"The Archdiocese of New York has been anticipating the filing of law suits since the Child Victim's Act passed earlier this year, even as we continue to invite people to consider our successful program to bring compensation quickly to qualified claimants through the archdiocesan Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program.

"While we carefully review the claims made in these suits, we ask that people pray for peace and healing for all those who have suffered from the sin and crime of the sexual abuse of minors, wherever it occurred, particularly victim-survivors and their families."

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