

NEWS

19-year-old drops rape charge vs priest

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Citing reasons of "reconciliation and peace," a 19-year-old Cebu resident has dropped a child-abuse complaint she filed against a priest one year ago. Sun-Star Cebu (sunstar.com.ph) reported Wednesday the woman filed an affidavit of desistance before Danao City prosecutor Jose Kyamko last Jan. 3. "After some serious and careful deliberation, I have decided to no longer pursue the (child abuse) case against BelciÃ±a for reasons of reconciliation and peace," it quoted the woman as saying in her affidavit. "In my quest for spiritual healing, I have decided to move on with my life and leave everything to God, to give Fr. BelciÃ±a the forgiveness he seeks," she added. The report said she had filed a child abuse complaint against Fr. Joey BelciÃ±a a year ago, accusing him of raping her at least thrice. It said the

woman did not waver in her intention to have it dismissed when she took the witness stand Tuesday. On the other hand, the report cited speculations that BelciÃ±a paid the woman P300,000 to drop the case, but BelciÃ±a's lawyer Sheilamar Saliganan said the priest was not even privy to the motion to dismiss. Judge Manuel Patalinghug of the Danao City Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 25 repeatedly asked the woman if she was sure she wanted to drop the case. On Feb. 10 last year, the woman filed a complaint accusing the priest of raping her at least thrice: on July 22, 2005; Dec. 25, 2005; and Jan. 28, 2006. A panel of prosecutors resolved to file only a case for child abuse, stating that consensual sex happened between the two. The woman was only 17 years old during the first incident. BelciÃ±a was the parish priest of Barangay Maslog, Danao City, when the incident happened. He took a leave of absence from the parish when the controversy broke out. After the woman testified Tuesday, she immediately left the courtroom along with a few supporters, her mother and a representative of Provincial Board Member Agnes Magpale. During the hearing, Judge Patalinghug asked the woman if her affidavit and testimony have the blessing of her parents and the social worker handling her case. She insisted she understood the affidavit and

that she was not forced to sign it. When the judge reminded her she can no longer re-file the case if she were to change her mind, she replied, "I want to move on and focus on my studies." - **GMANews.TV**

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