

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINTH
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR
ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA**

Shawn Teuber,

CASE NO.
DIVISION:

Plaintiff,

vs.

DIOCESE OF ORLANDO; ST. JOSEPH
CATHOLIC CHURCH PALM BAY, INC.;
ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL; and ST.
JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH AKA ST. JOSEPH
CATHOLIC PARISH,

Defendants.

/

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Shawn Teuber brings this Complaint against Defendants, DIOCESE OF ORLANDO; ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH PALM BAY, INC.; ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL; and ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH AKA ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC PARISH, as follows:

PARTIES AND JURISDICTION

1. This is a negligence action for damages, arising from the sexual abuse of a child by a priest, against the DIOCESE OF ORLANDO; ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH PALM BAY, INC.; ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL; and ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH AKA ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC PARISH. The alleged perpetrator of sexual abuse is FATHER ROBERT (BOB) HOEFFNER.

2 This action seeks compensation of not less than \$25 million, which exceeds the jurisdictional minimum of this Court.

3 Defendant DIOCESE OF ORLANDO (the “DIOCESE”) is a Florida religious institution and organization that is responsible for the interests of the Roman Catholic Church in Central Florida, including Brevard County. The principal place of business of the DIOCESE is in Orange County.

4 Defendant ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH PALM BAY, INC. (the “CORPORATE PARISH”) is a Florida corporation, established in 2023, located in Brevard County and operated and managed by the Diocese of Orlando.

5 Defendant ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL (the “SCHOOL”) is a Florida religious school located in Brevard County, which at all relevant times was controlled, operated and managed by the Diocese of Orlando.

6 Defendant ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH AKA ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC PARISH (the “CHURCH”) is a Florida religious institution and organization in Brevard County, which at all relevant times was controlled, operated and managed by the Diocese of Orlando.

7 The DIOCESE, CORPORATE PARISH, SCHOOL AND CHURCH are herein collectively referred to as the “DEFENDANTS.”

8 At all relevant times, FATHER ROBERT (BOB) HOEFFNER (“FATHER BOB”) was a priest and employee of the DEFENDANTS, subject to the DEFENDANTS’ authority and control.

9 At all relevant times, the DEFENDANTS employed, retained, supervised, controlled, or were otherwise responsible for FATHER BOB.

ALLEGATIONS OF FACT

10. Based upon information and belief, FATHER BOB was ordained as a priest in 1973 by Bishop William D. Borders at St. Anastasia Parish in Fort Pierce.

11. From 1973 through 1976, FATHER BOB was assigned to Good Shepherd Parish in Orlando. During this time, he taught at Bishop Moore Catholic High School and directed the San Pedro Spiritual Development Center, where he ran summer camps and retreats.

12. In 1976, FATHER BOB was moved to the DIOCESE's chancery office as the director of liturgy and ecumenism.

13. From 1978-1979, FATHER BOB was the school pastor for John Carroll High School in Fort Pierce, Florida.

14. Based upon information and belief, from 1978 through 1987, FATHER BOB served in multiple roles for the DIOCESE: as the director of liturgy, as Bishop Thomas Grady's master of ceremonies, as Vicar Forane, and as a member of the Presbyteral Council.

15. Based upon information and belief, in 1987, Bishop Grady offered FATHER BOB the opportunity to build a new parish in Orlando called St. Isaac Jogues Parish, which FATHER BOB worked on for several years.

16. In 1998, the DIOCESE appointed FATHER BOB pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Palm Bay, where he served both the CHURCH and SCHOOL until 2016, when, based on information and belief, he was terminated.

17. During, but not limited to the years, 1998-2016, the DEFENDANTS employed, retained, supervised, and/or controlled FATHER BOB as a priest and employee.

18. Plaintiff attended the SCHOOL from approximately 2009-2014, for fourth through eighth grades. He was also a parishioner of the CHURCH during this timeframe.

19. Plaintiff began having interactions with FATHER BOB during approximately his fifth-grade year when FATHER BOB walked around during school hours to bond/talk with students during lunch and at school events.

20. In approximately 2012 when Plaintiff was in seventh grade, FATHER BOB formed a close relationship with Plaintiff, earning Plaintiff's trust.

21. On many occasions during the year, FATHER BOB met alone with Plaintiff in the office of Dr. Gilbert, the School Counselor at ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL during all relevant times.

22. On many occasions, FATHER BOB pulled Plaintiff out of lunch or school events to bring him to Dr. Gilbert's office so that FATHER BOB could be alone with Plaintiff.

23. Additionally, various teachers permitted Plaintiff to leave class to meet with FATHER BOB alone in Dr. Gilbert's office during Plaintiff's seventh and eighth grade years.

24. FATHER BOB also brought Plaintiff for private meetings in the office of SALLY HOFFNER ("SALLY"), FATHER BOB's sister and an employee of DEFENDANTS during the relevant years. SALLY and FATHER BOB also lived together.

25. During this time, FATHER BOB groomed Plaintiff and made him feel special, ultimately making him into a compliant victim.

26. During Plaintiff's seventh grade year, FATHER BOB began making Plaintiff increasingly uncomfortable during these private meetings by asking questions such as whether

Plaintiff shaved his groin area and whether Plaintiff had engaged in intercourse. FATHER BOB did this both in the private meetings in Dr. Gilbert's office and during confessionals with Plaintiff.

27. From approximately 2012 when Plaintiff was in seventh grade, through 2014 when Plaintiff was in ninth grade, FATHER BOB sexually abused Plaintiff on multiple occasions in the following locations: Dr. Gilbert's office in the SCHOOL, FATHER BOB's home, and FATHER BOB's car.

28. During the summer of 2013 and/or 2014, Plaintiff frequently spent time with his friend B.K. at FATHER BOB's home. There, FATHER BOB sexually abused Plaintiff in his bedroom on multiple occasions.

29. Often, following these abuse incidents when FATHER BOB and Plaintiff exited the bedroom, SALLY was waiting outside the bedroom with Plaintiff's friend B.K., who would then enter the bedroom with FATHER BOB, while Plaintiff waited outside the bedroom with SALLY.

30. At all relevant times, SALLY was an agent, employee, and representative of the DEFENDANTS.

31. FATHER BOB also sexually abused Plaintiff in his car when he taught Plaintiff how to drive.

32. FATHER BOB often brought Plaintiff and B.K. out to dinner.

33. When FATHER BOB would drop Plaintiff off at his house after outings, he often kissed Plaintiff near the lips, cheek, and forehead when saying goodbye.

34. During the timeframe of abuse, Plaintiff attended altar server training with FATHER BOB at the CHURCH.

35. Upon information and belief, during the 2012-2013 school year, a student reported concerns about FATHER BOB's relationship with Plaintiff and other male students to the SCHOOL counselor, Dr. Gilbert. The concerns went unheeded, FATHER BOB remained in his position, and FATHER BOB continued to abuse Plaintiff.

36. At all relevant times, Dr. Gilbert was an agent, employee and representative of DEFENDANTS.

NOTICE – FORESEEABILITY

37. The DEFENDANTS knew or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known that FATHER BOB was unsafe and had a propensity to abuse Plaintiff and/or other male children.

38. With such actual or constructive knowledge, the DEFENDANTS gave FATHER BOB unfettered access to Plaintiff, thereby giving FATHER BOB the opportunity to commit foreseeable acts of sexual abuse on Plaintiff.

39. Upon information and belief, FATHER HOEFFNER was a prolific sex abuser of children, particularly young boys, he encountered in his duties for the DIOCESE, CORPORATE PARISH, CHURCH and SCHOOL.

40. Upon information and belief, FATHER BOB was enabled to commit heinous acts of sexual abuse on numerous children he encountered as a priest due to the gross indifference of DEFENDANTS and their utter disregard for the welfare of the children who participated in youth-serving activities in the CHURCH and SCHOOL.

DUTY

At all relevant times:

41. The DIOCESE, as principal, and the CORPORATE PARISH (as successor in interest to the SCHOOL and CHURCH), the SCHOOL, and the CHURCH, as agents, were in an agency relationship, such that the SCHOOL and CHURCH acted on the DIOCESE's behalf in accordance with the DIOCESE's instructions and directions on all matters. The acts and omissions of the SCHOOL and the CHURCH were subject to the DIOCESE's plenary control.

42. The DEFENDANTS and Plaintiff were in a special relationship of church – parishioner and educator – student in which they owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care to prevent foreseeable harm.

43. The DEFENDANTS further owed a duty to Plaintiff to use reasonable care to provide a safe environment for Plaintiff. The DEFENDANTS' duties encompassed using reasonable care in the retention, supervision, and hiring of FATHER BOB.

44. The DEFENDANTS and FATHER BOB were in a special relationship of employer – employee, in which the DEFENDANTS owed a duty to control the acts and conduct of FATHER BOB to prevent foreseeable harm.

45. The DEFENDANTS had a duty to exercise reasonable care in the training of their employees and agents in the prevention of sexual abuse and protection of the safety of their child parishioners and students.

46. The DEFENDANTS had a duty to establish and implement policies and procedures in the exercise of reasonable care for the prevention of sexual abuse and protection of the safety of their child parishioners and students.

BREACH

47. The DEFENDANTS breached their duties by: (i) failing to protect Plaintiff from sexual abuse committed by FATHER BOB, their agent and employee; (ii) failing to establish policies and procedures that were adequate to protect the health, safety and welfare of Plaintiff and protect him from sexual abuse; (iii) hiring, retaining, and/or failing to supervise FATHER BOB when they knew or should have known that he posed a substantial risk of harm to children, including Plaintiff; (iv) failing to adequately monitor and supervise Plaintiff on the premises of the SCHOOL and CHURCH; and (v) failing to investigate any acts or behaviors by FATHER BOB that could constitute grooming and/or sexual abuse of Plaintiff or any other child and to warn of FATHER BOB'S dangerous propensities.

NATURE OF CONDUCT ALLEGED

48. This action alleges physical, psychological and emotional injuries suffered as a result of acts of sexual battery that constitute violations of s. 794.011, Fla. Stat., on a victim under age 16, which occurred to Plaintiff on multiple occasions between 2012 and 2014.

49. Additionally, Plaintiff did not discover the causal relationship between his injuries and the sexual acts and conduct of FATHER BOB until within the four-year period preceding this action.

COUNT I - NEGLIGENCE **(against the DIOCESE OF ORLANDO)**

50. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 50 above.

51. The DIOCESE owed a duty to Plaintiff to protect him from foreseeable harm, and a duty to control FATHER BOB to prevent him from committing harmful, foreseeable acts while

acting as employee/agent. The DIOCESE was negligent in breaching these duties.

52. As a direct and proximate result of the DIOCESE's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

53. The DIOCESE's acts and conduct showed a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of Plaintiff and other children.

COUNT II – NEGLIGENCE
(against the ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH PALM BAY, INC.)

54. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 50 above.

55. The CORPORATE PARISH, as a successor in interest, owed a duty to Plaintiff to protect him from foreseeable harm, and a duty to control FATHER BOB to prevent him from committing harmful, foreseeable acts while acting as employee/agent. The CORPORATE PARISH was negligent in breaching these duties

56. As a direct and proximate result of the CORPORTATE PARISH's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

57. The CORPORATE PARISH's acts and conduct showed reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of Plaintiff and other children.

COUNT III - NEGLIGENCE
(against ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL)

58. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 50 above.

59. The SCHOOL owed a duty to Plaintiff to protect him from foreseeable harm, and a duty to control FATHER BOB to prevent him from committing harmful, foreseeable acts while

acting as employee/agent. The SCHOOL was negligent in breaching these duties.

60. As a direct and proximate result of the SCHOOL's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

61. The SCHOOL's acts and conduct showed a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of Plaintiff and other children.

COUNT IV- NEGLIGENCE
(against ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH)

62. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 50 above.

63. The CHURCH owed a duty to Plaintiff to protect him from foreseeable harm, and a duty to control FATHER BOB to prevent him from committing harmful, foreseeable acts while acting as employee/agent. The CHURCH was negligent in breaching these duties.

64. As a direct and proximate result of the CHURCH's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

65. The CHURCH's acts and conduct showed a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of Plaintiff and other children.

COUNT V – INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS
(against all DEFENDANTS)

66. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 50 above.

67. Each of the DEFENDANTS' acts, conduct and omissions were intentional or reckless.

68. Each of the DEFENDANTS' acts, conduct and omissions in failing to prevent FATHER BOB, a prolific pedophile and child sex abuser, from committing child sexual abuse with impunity in his role and duties as priest sexual predator, giving him unfettered and unsupervised access to a vulnerable population of underage males, was extreme and outrageous, going beyond all bounds of decency.

69. Each of the DEFENDANTS' conduct indicates a wanton disregard for the rights and safety of others, including Plaintiff.

70. Upon information and belief, each of the DEFENDANTS committed willful acts of disregarding and concealing FATHER BOB's child sexual abuse. These acts directly resulted in Plaintiff's sexual abuse causing his mental and emotional health to be significantly impaired.

71. Each of the DEFENDANTS' acts, conduct and omissions caused severe emotional distress to Plaintiff. Each of the DEFENDANTS knew or had reason to know that their intentional and outrageous conduct would cause emotional distress and damage to Plaintiff, and the DEFENDANTS acted with reckless disregard of the high probability of causing severe emotional distress to Plaintiff.

72. As a direct and proximate result of the Defendant's intentional or reckless conduct, Plaintiff has suffered and will continue to suffer mental anguish and pain.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against the DIOCESE, the CORPORATE PARISH, the SCHOOL, and the CHURCH for compensatory damages, costs, and such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper. Plaintiff intends to move for leave to plead punitive damages based on evidence demonstrating the foregoing facts pursuant to Fla. Stat. § 768.72.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff demands a jury trial in this action.

Dated: May 30, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

HERMAN LAW
1800 N. Military Tr., Suite 140
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Tel: 305-931-2200
Fax: 305-931-0877

By: /s/ Jeff Herman
Jeff Herman
Florida Bar No. 521647
jherman@hermanlaw.com
Jenny Rossman
Florida Bar No. 84625
jrossman@hermanlaw.com
Sam Herman
Florida Bar No. 1057858
sherman@hermanlaw.com