

The New York Times Reprints

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. Order a reprint of this article now.



July 10, 2011

Accusations of Abuse by Priest Dating to Early 1940s

By DAN FROSCH

WINSLOW, Ariz. — Alfred Moya was stopping at a restaurant in rural Gallup, N.M., on his way home to Phoenix in the summer of 2007 when he happened to glance at a newspaper article about children who had been sexually abused by a priest.

Suddenly, his thoughts flashed to his own days as an altar boy in nearby Holbrook, Ariz., and the town's charismatic priest, the Rev. Clement A. Hageman. "And then I started remembering," he would later recount, according to court documents.

Over the past few years, a growing number of predominantly Hispanic men from the string of dusty towns along Route 66 in Arizona have stepped forward, alleging that Father Hageman sexually abused them as boys when he worked in local parishes from the early 1940s until his death in 1975.

A recent study commissioned by the nation's Roman Catholic bishops found the rise of sexual abuse in the church coincided with the social and sexual tumult of the 1960s and '70s. But the story of Father Hageman, as told through recently released church documents chronicling his troubles, begins much earlier.

Indeed, the priest has long haunted the deeply Catholic Hispanic communities around Holbrook, Winslow and Kingman, Ariz. His accusers said that he was "dumped" in impoverished, nonwhite communities by church officials to avoid scandal, an assertion that has emerged in other recent abuse cases.

"The premise we've been hearing is that the evidence is dead, the people are dead and that this was a problem of the '60s and '70s," said Patrick Wall, a former priest and canon lawyer who investigated abuse cases for the church and now helps victims. "This case cracks open a door that has been closed for 60 years."

Mr. Moya, 70, is believed to be the first to file a lawsuit against the Catholic Church over the priest's alleged abuse, which dates to a time when the poor pockets of Mexican-Americans who lived here dared not question the local priest. His lawyer, Robert E. Pastor, said he expected to file a second suit next month on behalf of at least two more local men who say they, too, were abused by the priest. And Mr. Pastor said nine others settled with the Diocese of Gallup, N.M., over claims involving Father Hageman.

"This priest was so proficient, he abused everywhere he went," Mr. Pastor said.

Filed in Coconino County Superior Court last August, Mr. Moya's lawsuit names the Diocese of Gallup, which oversaw the churches where Father Hageman spent much of his career, as a defendant. It also names the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Tex., and the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, N.M., which the lawsuit contends were involved in the priest's placements.

The suit alleges that Father Hageman started sexually abusing Mr. Moya when he was 12 and that church officials in all three dioceses covered up the priest's behavior.

The Corpus Christi and Santa Fe dioceses have sought to have the lawsuit dismissed, arguing they were not responsible for supervising Father Hageman after he was transferred to Arizona. In a statement, the Corpus Christi Diocese said that the accusations did not involve any current member of the clergy or church worker associated with them.

The Gallup Diocese, meanwhile, responded in court filings that it lacked "sufficient knowledge or information" to know if Mr. Moya's accusations were true. Moreover, the diocese argued that Mr. Moya's claims against it should be barred because Father Hageman's alleged abuse was "completely outside the scope of his employment as a Roman Catholic priest."

Robert P. Warburton, a lawyer for both the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and the Gallup Diocese, declined to discuss the case, stating in a letter last week that further files on the priest, requested by Mr. Pastor, do not exist.

Father Clem, as parishioners called him, was born in Glandorf, Ohio, and ordained at age 25. He spent much of his life working at six rural parishes in New Mexico and Arizona, and church records recall him as popular.

But there are other memories.

"We'd all be playing on the playground, and he'd come walking, point at one of us, and move his

finger to come with him inside the rectory,” recalled Joseph Baca, a Winslow man who says he was raped and molested repeatedly by Father Hageman and whose claims were detailed in an affidavit taken during settlement negotiations with the Gallup Diocese. “At first, I thought I was the only one.”

After Mr. Baca came forward, Bishop Donald E. Pelotte of Gallup apologized in 2005 for crimes committed by clergy members, calling Father Hageman and another clergyman two of the “most abusive priests of the diocese,” according to news reports at the time.

Mr. Pastor pointed to the recently released documents on Father Hageman as evidence that diocesan officials knew the priest was troubled.

In one letter from December 1940, the bishop of Gallup asked a colleague his opinion of the priest and relayed the archbishop of Santa Fe’s concern that Father Hageman “was guilty of playing with boys.”

In another, to the bishop of Gallup in 1952, Father Hageman describes being confronted by two men over his actions: “I had been drinking and perhaps while under the influence of liquor, I might have been imprudent in my dealings with boys.”

The release of such extensive documents, which came during the lawsuit, is unusual, according to experts on abuse in the church. “I believe this is the most extensive and longest sex abuse file that has ever been made public by the Catholic Church,” said Joelle Casteix, Western regional director for the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests.

Recently in Winslow, Mr. Baca was joined by three middle-age Hispanic men who spoke of being abused by the priest. The men once attended Madre de Dios, a tiny church on the edge of town where Father Hageman worked that is ringed by ramshackle homes and a vacant field.

All but one said they had reached settlements with the Gallup Diocese. None would disclose the amount. The men also told of living broken lives in the shadow of what they said happened to them.

That afternoon, Mr. Baca and some of the men walked the grounds of their old church. One, who gave only his first name, Paul, because he had not spoken publicly about his case, motioned toward a door to the church’s sacristy. After Mass, Father Hageman locked it so the altar boys could not leave, Paul recalled.

“I don’t come here anymore,” he said.