

## AUSTIN WOMEN SUE DIOCESE OF AUSTIN FOR SEXUAL ABUSE COVER UP

**November 15, 2018** – AUSTIN, TX – The #MeToo movement has arrived at the doorstep of the Catholic Church, on the heels of this week’s unsuccessful U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, where Bishops failed to vote on proposals for dealing with the abuse crisis. The Conference was led by Texas Arch-Bishop Daniel DiNardo, who also serves as USCCB President.

Related to the inaction, six Austin women filed suit against the Catholic Diocese of Austin, Bishop Joe Vásquez and local priest Fr. Isidore Ndagizimana (aka “Father Izzy”) relating to allegations of sexual abuse they suffered in recent years at the hands of Fr. Isidore at St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Austin.

While the Catholic Church has been inundated with pedophilia charges over the past six years, the recent [grand jury report](#) from the Pennsylvania Attorney General investigation also highlighted the need to investigate the sexual abuse of adult women in the Catholic Church. That issue, however, has largely gone ignored and unaddressed, until now.

This suit alleges a Catholic priest in the Austin Diocese was a predator known to the Diocese who had regularly abused and harassed female parishioners. The plaintiffs have filed anonymously as “Jane Doe 1–6” to protect their families and for fear of retaliation. The victims are all dedicated women of faith, who are wives, mothers, and active parish volunteers who have found their lives destabilized as a result of the abuse, an subsequent inaction they experienced in their most sacred ‘home’ – their church.

The victims allege that the Diocese, Bishop and Cardinal DiNardo knew they had a predatory priest in Fr. Isidore who was abusing and harassing women. Per the court filings, the Diocese’s solution was to cover it up and move the priest from parish to parish, where his predatory nature and victimization would begin again. That, according to the women, is how the predator and his abuse came to find them, and others, at St. Thomas More Parish.

The petition, filed with the Travis County District Court today, alleges that this priest had many victims, only a handful of whom are included in this lawsuit. The victims claim significant damages, including mental anguish, psychological trauma, and feelings of humiliation, shame and guilt that persist to this day. Many of the women reportedly suffered in silence until some worked up the courage to complain to the Diocese, the Bishop and even the Cardinal. The suit alleges that the Bishop and Diocese asked those who complained to stay quiet, do nothing, and let the Church handle it. During interviews with the victims, it is also alleged that the Diocesan legal counsel asked that the Bishop be excused in order to protect his ears from the lewd descriptions of the abuse they had suffered. The Diocese promised action for the women, but not on a priority level because—according to the court filings—they were not considered “vulnerable” like children or those with other mental incapacity.

According to the petition, the Diocese and the Bishop ultimately decided to, once again, move Father Isidore to a new parish in the Diocese without any warning to those parishioners. That response is not a solution, according to the Plaintiffs—it is simply part of a broken system that re-sets the clock on the cycle of abuse. It was the inaction by the Diocese that caused these women of deep faith to arrive at the decision to seek outside legal counsel in order to provoke change in the church that they love.

“The system has been hijacked by a clerical bureaucracy that is allowing victims to be injured and re-injured by Church inaction,” said Sean Breen, lead attorney for the women and a partner at Austin-based Howry, Breen & Herman, LLP. Breen continued, “That system needs to change. And, if the Catholic Church will not voluntarily change it, then a Texas jury has the power to change it. The victims here seek that change and protection for their families and others in The Church.”

Sources have stated there are many other victims in the community. Anyone who has witnessed or been a victim of such abuse, or has any information related to this suit is urged to contact Howry, Breen and Herman, LLP at <https://www.howrybreen.com/personal-injury/clergy-sexual-abuse/> or 512-474-7300.

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