

FILED

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF MECKLENBURG

IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE  
SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

2020 APR 13 A 9:20 CV5 5841

JOHN DOE 1K,

Plaintiff,

v.

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
CHARLOTTE A/K/A ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF CHARLOTTE, NC

Defendant.

MECKLENBURG CO., C.S.C.

BY \_\_\_\_\_

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, by and through counsel, complaining of Defendant, alleges and says as follows:

**INTRODUCTION**

1. As a child, Plaintiff was sexually abused on several occasions by a Catholic priest that Defendant knew or should have known was a child predator. As we all now know, this was sadly a very common experience, and for decades the Catholic Church has done everything within its power to conceal misconduct, shelter abusers, shame the abused and avoid being held responsible for the epidemic of child sexual abuse that it caused. The North Carolina General Assembly, in recognition of the fact that most victims of child sexual abuse do not come forward until well into adulthood, has created a two-year window to allow lawsuits like this one to be brought even if they were previously barred under the statute of limitations. As an adult, Plaintiff continues to suffer the crippling effects of the abuse he sustained as a child. When he previously sought to hold the Church accountable, he was villainized and shamed *en route* to having his case dismissed based on the statute of limitations. He now brings this case based on the new law recently passed in North Carolina. Despite the fact that he was previously accused of fabricating

his claims, Plaintiff's allegation has now been listed by Defendant as a credible allegation of sexual abuse on the list published in December of 2019. From the Vatican all the way to Charlotte, what we have all heard in recent years is that it is a new day with the Catholic Church and the Charlotte Diocese when it comes to victims of child sexual abuse. Nonetheless, when given a choice, Defendant has chosen to fight this claim rather than make any reasonable attempt to settle it, and will now seek to claim that the recently passed law somehow does not apply to Plaintiff, a man clearly within the group of people the General Assembly sought to benefit. Despite all pronouncements to the contrary, it seems it is not a new day at all.

### PARTIES

2. This case involves sexual assault(s), battery(ies) and act(s), sexual contact and touching of a minor child, perpetrated by an agent of Defendant and otherwise caused by Defendant's negligent and tortious conduct. Given the nature of the case, Plaintiff is identified herein only by pseudonym to prevent public disclosure of his name and further harm to him. Plaintiff's counsel has disclosed the full name of the Plaintiff to Defendant's counsel with the agreement and assurance to maintain confidentiality until further orders of the Court. All parties consent to proceeding by using Plaintiff's pseudonym.

3. Plaintiff John Doe 1K is a citizen and resident of Georgia. He was a minor child incapable consent at the time of the acts complained of, but is currently an adult.

4. Defendant Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte a/k/a Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte, NC (hereinafter "Defendant"), is, and at all times material was, an unincorporated religious association with its principal place of business in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. All allegations contained herein against said Defendant also refer to and include the principals,

officers, board members, directors, agents, employees, partners and/or servants of said Defendant, either directly or vicariously, under the principles of corporate liability, apparent authority, agency, ostensible agency, respondeat superior and estoppel and that the acts, practices, and omissions of Defendant's officers, board members, directors, agents, employees, partners and/or servants are imputed to Defendant.

5. Joseph Kelleher ("Kelleher") was a priest in good standing from 1972 until 2010, at which time he was removed from active ministry due to the allegations of sexual misconduct perpetrated against John Doe 1K.

6. At the time of the allegations which form the basis of this Complaint, Kelleher was a priest in active ministry within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte, NC, and was an employee, agent, apparent agent and/or servant of Defendant, and was under Defendant's complete control and/or supervision, employed as a priest, spiritual advisor, counselor and mentor.

7. As a result of the allegations made by John Doe 1K, Kelleher was charged criminally in Stanly County, North Carolina. Kelleher died with said criminal charges still pending.

8. Kelleher's actions complained of herein, were within the scope of his employment with the Defendant, were authorized by Defendant who placed Kelleher in a position to engage in counseling of minors in an unsupervised manner despite his tendencies toward child predation, and/or were ratified by Defendant, which knew or should have known of Kelleher's conduct, and did nothing to prevent, stop or correct it (and in fact continued to assert that he was a fit and proper person for priestly duties, including counseling of children).

## BACKGROUND

9. In 1977, John Doe 1K was a 14-year-old boy who was having hard time dealing with events in his life, including his family's move to Stanly County, North Carolina. At the urging of his grandmother – a devout Christian – Doe agreed to counseling from Kelleher, who had a reputation for counseling troubled teens.

10. Thereafter, John Doe 1K went to see Kelleher in the rectory at Our Lady of the Annunciation in Albemarle, North Carolina. He truly hoped that Kelleher could help him, and trusted him to provide counseling and mentoring services. Having lost both of his grandfathers at a young age, Plaintiff saw Kelleher as the grandfather he lacked.

11. A fiduciary relationship was formed between Plaintiff and Defendant, and between Plaintiff and Defendant's agent, Kelleher. Within the scope of his agency with Defendant, Kelleher served as a mentor, counselor and priest to Plaintiff, and used these positions of confidence and authority to abuse Plaintiff. As a religious leader, cloaked with the authority of the Defendant, Kelleher stood in a position of superior power and authority over Plaintiff, who was in a clearly inferior position. Similarly, as a minor child seeking mentoring and counseling from Defendant and trusting Defendant to provide these services, Plaintiff similarly stood in an inferior position of weakness and powerlessness compared to the superior position of power, trust and authority Defendant held over him. Moreover, Defendants agents, servants and/or employees, including Kelleher, acted *in loco parentis* to Plaintiff at all times in which he was receiving counseling and other services from Kelleher.

12. Plaintiff came to Defendant and Kelleher as a desperate child seeking help, willing to share his deepest fears and anxieties with them in order to be helped, coming to them

as religious leaders and counselors, placing his life in their hands with great trust and vulnerability.

13. John Doe 1K was not molested at his first “counseling session” with Kelleher. Instead, Kelleher engaged John Doe 1K in conversation about his life and problems. Kelleher encouraged Plaintiff to put his full trust and confidence in him. As he later told police, Kelleher sought to obtain Plaintiff’s “dependency.”

14. During the second “counseling session,” Kelleher had Plaintiff lie down on the floor, knelt beside him, and had a general conversation about Plaintiff’s family, emotional status, and problems. He then had Plaintiff open his legs, spread his arms, and imagine that he was floating in space. He began rubbing Plaintiff’s chest, legs, and arms, and slowly pulled up Plaintiff’s shirt to massage his bare chest. He asked Plaintiff questions such as “are you relaxed?” and “are you still floating?”. Kelleher then unbuttoned Plaintiff’s pants and began asking Plaintiff about which famous people he found attractive. Because Plaintiff had a poster of Farah Fawcett Majors in a bathing suit on his bedroom wall, he told Plaintiff to think about her. Kelleher then proceeded to sexually assault Plaintiff while continuing to instruct him to think about Farah Fawcett Majors.

15. Over the course of several months in 1977 and 1978, Kelleher sexually assaulted John Doe 1K on several additional occasions in the rectory at Our Lady of the Annunciation.

16. After he was charged with a felony, Kelleher made statements to law enforcement that he sexually assaulted John Doe 1K in order to gain his “dependency,” and as part of his efforts to counsel John Doe 1K and prevent him from running away from home. He claimed that his sexual assaults were done to be able to better connect with and control Plaintiff as a part of his counseling. Specifically, and without limitation, he stated that he saw molesting Plaintiff as

“an opportunity to gain his dependency so that he felt like he owed me and wouldn’t run away.” He also stated, “I was trying to get his trust,” “I tried to help him with his masturbation” and “I touched his penis.”

17. Kelleher represented his acts of abuse to be part of his counseling of Plaintiff, done as a part of his employment with Defendant, and on Defendant’s property. The sexual assaults occurred during “counseling sessions” at the rectory, undertaken by Kelleher as an agent of Defendant.

18. Kelleher’s sexual abuse of the 14-year-old John Doe 1K was within the scope of his actual and apparent agency with Defendant.

19. Prior to these acts of abuse against Plaintiff, Defendant knew or should have known that Kelleher had sexually abused other minor children in the past. Alternatively, Defendant knew or should have known that Kelleher was someone who should be thoroughly investigated before being hired and being allowed to spend time with children unsupervised and have children under his care.

20. Defendant had received at least one report of sexual abuse by Kelleher against a minor child before his last act of sexual abuse against John Doe 1K.

21. Like many other child molesting priests, Kelleher was moved frequently from one assignment to the other because Defendant knew of the allegations against him. Moreover, Defendant was aware before hiring Kelleher of his frequent changes of assignment prior to coming to the Charlotte Diocese.

22. Defendant was also aware that Kelleher spent significant time with children both on Defendant’s property and on trips (including overnight trips) off of the Defendant’s property, which afforded significant private, unsupervised time with underaged children.

23. Upon information and belief, Defendant was actually aware of Kelleher's propensity toward child sexual abuse before he was hired by Defendant, and before he abused John Doe 1K. In any event, Defendant should have known of this propensity before Kelleher was hired, and before and during his abuse of John Doe 1K.

24. Defendant had a duty to any and all children – including John Doe 1K – who were placed in Defendant's care for counseling, mentoring, child care or other services, to provide a provide a safe, secure environment.

25. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known that providing sufficient staffing of at least two or more properly trained workers in the same child care environment decreased the likelihood of a worker committing unlawful, lewd and lascivious acts upon the children in their care.

26. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known that a thorough vetting of agents, servants and/or employees in charge of children was required to reduce the likelihood of such persons committing unlawful, lewd and lascivious acts upon the children in their care.

27. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known of the need to properly and actively maintain, monitor, inspect, patrol and manage its employees/agents who were entrusted with the care of children.

28. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known of the need to maintain adequate and appropriate monitoring systems, policies and procedures for the safety of the children in its care. Further, that upon suspicion of irregularities and inappropriate behavior, it would be imperative to preserve any and all evidence available to assist in determining wrongdoing.

29. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known of the need to properly and adequately supervise and train the personnel who were entrusted with the care of children.

30. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known of the potentially dangerous and hazardous conditions children could be exposed to when there was inadequate vetting, training, monitoring, surveillance, retention and supervision of its personnel entrusted with the care of children.

31. At the time of the events complained of, Defendant knew or should have known that children entrusted to it for counseling, mentoring, child care or other services relied upon Defendant for the following:

- a. to provide a secure, safe, non-injurious environment for children in which they would not be injured;
- b. to provide sufficient staffing of at least two or more workers at all times in the same child care environment;
- c. to provide a thorough vetting of agents, servants and/or employees so as to provide a secure, safe, non-injurious environment for children in which they would not be injured;
- d. to properly maintain, secure, surveil, inspect, patrol and actively manage its employees/agents who were entrusted with the care of children;
- e. to maintain active and adequate monitoring systems, policies and procedures for the safety of the children in its care;
- f. to properly and adequately supervise and train its agents, servants and/or employees who were entrusted with the care of children;
- g. to prevent exposure to dangerous, injurious and hazardous conditions; and
- h. to provide proper oversight in a child care environment.



32. Defendant, without proper vetting and training, negligently employed Kelleher as a priest, counselor, spiritual advisor and mentor, and allowed him to have significant access to children without supervision.

33. Through its employment of Kelleher and its other failures including those herein outlined, Defendant negligently and intentionally misled Plaintiff, his family, parishioners and others into believing that children were being placed in a secure, safe, non-injurious environment during the time they were under the care of Kelleher.

34. Upon information and belief, Defendant, in advance of and/or contemporaneously with the ongoing sexual assault(s), battery(ies) and act(s) of sexual contact and touching of Plaintiff, was aware its vetting of Kelleher was inadequate and insufficient, was aware that Kelleher had acted inappropriately toward children in the past, and was put on notice of at least one complaint of sexual assault against a child in his care.

35. A proper vetting of Kelleher would have revealed that he was unsuitable to employ or be permitted to provide care for minors, and that he was a child predator or a probable child predator, and that to put children in his care placed the children at great risk of physical harm and emotional injury.

36. Defendant was negligent before, during and after the sexual assaults upon John Doe 1K in that it:

- a. failed to adequately investigate Kelleher's background and credentials prior to hiring him;
- b. hired Kelleher and allowed him unsupervised access to children when it knew or should have known that he had a history of prior complaints of inappropriate contact and involvement with minor children;
- c. hired Kelleher even though it knew or should have known he would be placed in an environment without other adult supervision, guidance and

training where he could or may exploit and sexually molest minor children;

- d. allowed Kelleher to work in an environment which it knew or should have known would subject minor children to unreasonable risk of harm;
- e. failed to adequately supervise Kelleher;
- f. failed to adequately investigate Kelleher's background, or allegations against him;
- g. failed to exercise reasonable care in the hiring of Kelleher;
- h. failed to exercise reasonable care in the establishment of child care protection safeguards for its employees;
- i. failed to arrange for proper supervision, oversight and direction of employees entrusted with the care of children;
- j. failed to provide a secure, safe, non-injurious environment for the children in its care;
- k. failed to ensure that employees were not allowed to spend time privately with children with no other adult present;
- l. failed to provide a thorough vetting of agents, servants and/or employees;
- m. failed to properly maintain, secure, inspect, patrol and manage its properties where children were entrusted to its care;
- n. failed to establish and maintain adequate monitoring/surveillance systems, policies, and procedures for the safety of the children in its care;
- o. failed to prevent exposure to dangerous and hazardous conditions;
- p. failed to terminate Kelleher when it knew or should have known of his propensity to injure children, and failure to prevent him from continuing to have unsupervised access to children;
- q. failed to provide proper oversight of the child care environment;
- r. entrusted workplace child care services to Kelleher;
- s. failed to timely respond to complaints received about Kelleher;

- t. failed to establish and/or follow its own internally set guidelines and procedures;
- u. failed to warn Plaintiff, his family and others of the dangers of having children entrusted to Kelleher; and
- v. was otherwise careless, reckless and negligent.

37. At all times relevant herein, Defendant, including by and through its agents, misrepresented material facts in that it represented that its agents, including Kelleher, were fit and proper persons to provide counseling, mentoring and other services to children: that children such as John Doe 1K would be safe under the care of Defendant; that Defendant had properly selected its agents in a manner such that children would be safe with them; that it possessed policies and procedures to keep children safe; and otherwise that children would be safe and free from abuse with Defendant and its agents (including Kelleher specifically).

38. Moreover, Defendant, including by and through its agents, omitted material facts by failing and refusing to inform Plaintiff and others that its agents (including Kelleher) presented a risk of abuse to children; that children such as John Doe 1K would not be safe under the care of Defendant; that Defendant had not properly selected its agents in a manner such that children would be safe with them; that it lacked policies and procedures to keep children safe; and that children would otherwise be unsafe and at risk for abuse with Defendant and its agents (including Kelleher).

39. Plaintiff and others, in an inferior position to Defendant and respecting the religious authority of Defendant and its agents, reasonably relied upon these representations and omissions to their detriment, in that abuse occurred as a proximate cause of said misrepresentations and omissions, which occurred before, during and after the abuse.

40. As a result of the sexual assaults alleged herein, John Doe 1K suffered severe injuries of a sexual, emotional and physical nature, exposure to adult sexual acts, possible exposure to communicable diseases and has and will require counseling, social reintegration, loss of a feeling of security and protection, humiliation, and other untoward ramifications and medical expenses that will continue for a lifetime. These injuries were reasonably foreseeable, and a direct and proximate result of the acts, practices and omissions of Defendant as alleged herein, and entitle Plaintiff to compensation for his past, current and prospective losses.

**FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Assault and Battery)**

41. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

42. On several occasions over the course of several months in 1977 and 1978, Plaintiff was sexually assaulted by Kelleher during "counseling sessions" within the scope of his agency with Defendant, and on Defendant's property.

43. Defendant, through the words and actions of its agent Kelleher, placed John Doe 1K in imminent fear or apprehension of imminent harmful and/or offensive contact, thus committing assault.

44. Defendant also engaged in unlawful and unpermitted physical contact with Plaintiff, thus committing battery.

45. Defendant's assaults and batteries occurred without Plaintiff's consent and without lawful justification or excuse.

46. John Doe 1K was not legally capable of consenting to these assaults and batteries, including on account of his age.

47. The conduct of Defendant proximately and directly caused the foreseeable injuries suffered by Plaintiff, including severe emotional distress. Plaintiff has required medical and psychiatric attention, endured pain, suffered mental and emotional trauma, and sustained a loss of dignity and individuality. These injuries are all ongoing and will continue into the future.

**SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress)**

48. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

49. Defendant, by and through its agent Kelleher, committed sexual assaults and batteries of John Doe 1K while he was a minor child.

50. These actions constitute extreme and outrageous conduct, and were undertaken with the intent to cause severe emotional distress or with reckless indifference to the likelihood that they would cause severe emotional distress to Plaintiff.

51. Defendant acted intentionally and/or with a conscious indifference to Plaintiff's health and safety, thereby constituting willful or wanton conduct.

52. The conduct of Defendant proximately and directly caused the foreseeable injuries suffered by Plaintiff, including severe emotional distress. Plaintiff has required medical and psychiatric attention, endured pain, suffered mental and emotional trauma, and sustained a loss of dignity and individuality. These injuries are all ongoing and will continue into the future.

**THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Negligence)**

53. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

54. As set forth in more detail above, Defendant owed duties of care to Plaintiff.

55. The acts and omissions of Defendant set forth in more detail above constitute breaches of said duties, and therefore constitute actionable negligence, including but not limited to negligent operation of Defendant's organization and property, as well as negligent hiring, supervision and retention of Kelleher.

56. Said negligence was a proximate cause of Plaintiffs' resulting injuries and damages which are set forth in more detail below.

57. By and through the actions set forth above, Defendant was reckless and acted in conscious disregard for the safety of Plaintiff, and such actions constituted willful and wanton conduct and gross negligence.

**FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress)**

58. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

59. Defendant's conduct described above was negligent.

60. It was reasonably foreseeable to Defendant that said conduct would cause severe emotional distress to Plaintiff.

61. Defendant's conduct as described above did in fact proximately cause Plaintiff to suffer severe emotional distress, and was a proximate cause of Plaintiff's resulting injuries and damages which are set forth in more detail below.

**FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Breach of Fiduciary Duty)**

62. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

63. As set forth above, Defendant owed a fiduciary duty to Plaintiff.

64. Plaintiff placed trust and confidence in Defendant, and Defendant was vested with confidence and authority which gave rise to a fiduciary duty.

65. These fiduciary relationships of trust and confidence led up to and surrounded the events complained of herein.

66. These relationships required Defendant to act in good faith and with due regard for the best interests of Plaintiff.

67. The acts and omissions of Defendant set forth in more detail above constitute breaches of said fiduciary duty.

68. Said breaches of fiduciary duty were a proximate cause of Plaintiff's resulting injuries and damages which are set forth in more detail below.

**SIXTH CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Constructive Fraud)**

69. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

70. As set forth above, Defendant owed a fiduciary duty to Plaintiff.

71. Plaintiff placed trust and confidence in Defendant, and Defendant was vested with confidence and authority which gave rise to a fiduciary duty.

72. These fiduciary relationships of trust and confidence led up to and surrounded the events complained of herein.

73. These relationships required Defendant to act in good faith and with due regard for the best interests of Plaintiff.

74. By and through the actions complained of herein, Defendant abused its relationship with Plaintiff, breached its fiduciary duties, and in doing so took advantage of its relationships in a way that was intended to, and in fact did, injure Plaintiff and benefit the Defendant. These benefits included, without limitation, that Kelleher – acting as Defendant’s agent – benefitted himself by abusing his power over Plaintiff to satisfy his own perverse sexual desire, and to do so in manner which minimized his likelihood of being held responsible for his actions. Defendant – by allowing an individual it knew or should have known to be a child predator to have unfettered and unsupervised access to minor children, and by failing to act on complaints and suspicions of inappropriate behavior – benefitted itself by continuing to avoid public scrutiny and accountability for the epidemic of child sexual abuse that it knowingly fostered for decades. Moreover, Defendant gained control over Plaintiff through these breaches of fiduciary duty in order to control his behavior.

75. Said breaches of fiduciary duty and instances of constructive fraud were a proximate cause of Plaintiffs’ resulting injuries and damages which are set forth in more detail below.

**SEVENTH CAUSE OF ACTION**  
**(Misrepresentation and Fraud)**

76. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

77. Before, during and after the acts of sexual misconduct alleged herein, Defendant made material misrepresentations as set forth in more detail above with regard to the safety of children within its care generally, and with regard to Kelleher specifically.



78. Before, during and after the acts of sexual misconduct alleged herein, Defendant made material omissions as set forth in more detail above with regard to the dangers to children within its care generally, and with regard to Kelleher specifically.

79. These misrepresentations/omissions were made knowing that they were false, or at best with a negligent disregard for their truthfulness and culpable ignorance of their falsity.

80. These misrepresentations/omissions were made with the intent that they be relied upon, and they actually were reasonably relied upon by Plaintiff, therefore proximately causing Plaintiff's damages as set forth in more detail below.

81. All of these misrepresentations/omissions were with regard to material facts.

82. Said misrepresentations/omissions were false when made, were reasonably calculated to deceive, in fact did deceive Plaintiff, were reasonably relied upon by Plaintiff, and thereby proximately caused Plaintiff's damages as set forth in more detail below.

### **PUNITIVE DAMAGES**

83. Plaintiff restates and realleges the paragraphs above.

84. The acts, practices and omissions of Defendant were committed in reckless disregard of the rights of others including Plaintiff herein, and were grossly negligent, fraudulent, intentional and malicious. The egregiously wrongful acts of Defendant need to be punished and similar acts by Defendant and others need to be deterred. Thus, recovery of punitive damages is appropriate.

### **DAMAGES**


85. As a direct and proximate result of the acts and omissions of Defendant set forth above, John Doe 1K has suffered devastating physical and emotional injuries, has required

reasonable and necessary medical and psychological treatment at great expense, and is expected to suffer similar injuries and require additional treatment throughout his life. He is entitled to all damages allowable for the causes of action listed above as are allowed by law. For purposes of establishing that the case belongs in Superior Court, Plaintiff seeks damages in excess of \$25,000.00. In reality, Plaintiff's damages far exceed this jurisdictional amount.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully prays unto the Court as follows:

1. That Plaintiff have and recover of the Defendant sums in excess of \$25,000.00, an amount stated here only because it is the jurisdictional amount for Superior Court. In reality, Plaintiff's damages far exceed this jurisdictional amount;
2. That Plaintiff recover punitive damages in an amount to be determined by the jury;
3. That the judgment include pre-judgment and post-judgment interest under applicable law;
4. For costs and attorney's fees pursuant to applicable law;
5. For a jury trial on all issues so triable; and
6. For such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

This the 13<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2020.

  
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Sam McGee, NC Bar # 25343  
**TIN, FULTON, WALKER & OWEN**  
301 East Park Avenue  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203  
Telephone: (704) 338-1220  
Facsimile: (704) 338-1312  
*Attorneys for Plaintiff*