

Personnel file material released in long-settled California abuse cases

SAN DIEGO - After a California court Oct. 22 ordered the release of documents from the Dioceses of San Diego and San Bernardino related to past cases of improper sexual conduct of four dozen priests, more than 10,000 pages of material was made public.

Among the information released, much of which was posted on the website bishopaccountability.org were thousands of pages of routine personnel material as well as letters and other information detailing complaints about priests and the responses of their dioceses at the time claims were made against them.

None of the priests in question remain in the dioceses; only six of them are still living.

A 2007 settlement between the dioceses and 144 plaintiffs who sued over allegations of sexual abuse by priests included an agreement to turn over the priests' personnel documents, subject to the review of a judge.

The San Diego Diocese also agreed to pay out more than \$182 million to 133 plaintiffs for complaints against priests of the diocese and several religious orders serving there. The San Bernardino Diocese, which separated from its southern neighbor in 1978, paid out \$15 million for 11 cases.

After reviewing the records, retired Judge William C. Pate, acting for the Los Angeles Superior Court where the case is being handled, ordered documents related to 48 priests to be made public. In many of the documents, names and other identifying details have been redacted.

Neither diocese had commented on the released documents as of Oct. 25.

Among the information released was the file of a Colombian-born priest whose name had not previously surfaced in public accounts of lawsuits or criminal cases.

Father Luis Eugene de Francisco was investigated by San Diego police for allegations of sexual abuse of children in three parishes, resulting in his arrest. Under an agreement reached between the diocese and the police in 1963, Father de Francisco was allowed to return to his home diocese in Cali, Colombia, after promising never to return to the United States.

The material released gives no details of what happened to Father de Francisco after that, but it notes that he also worked in Florida and Texas before going to California. If he is still alive, he'd be 102 this year.

In a letter among the released material, then-San Diego Bishop Charles F. Buddy wrote to Father de Francisco that although "you have won a reputation as a zealous worker and devoted to the poor ... the 'incidents' at Indio were more serious than first presented to me, especially inasmuch as the police have made a record of them. You know how word gets around so that you (may) be certain that the police here will be on your trail. ... It will be more prudent and more secure for you to return to your own diocese."

Another file included details of the long-term and widely acknowledged relationship between another priest, Father Peadar Brennan, and a married woman, which resulted in the birth of at least two children. The documents reflect a later relationship which also resulted in the birth of a child before the priest resigned in 1995 to seek laicization and marriage.

Since at least 1985, a man whose name was redacted in the file had been appealing to the Diocese of San Bernardino to remove the priest permanently from his parish

because of his involvement with the man's wife. Among the documents in this file was an obituary for an infant, identifying his father as Peter Brennan, as the priest also was known.

There was no indication of the date of the obituary, but one letter in the file in 1988 noted that the woman, to whom then-Father Brennan was paying child support, had given birth to a second child who had serious birth defects and was not expected to live.