

VICTIMS' LAWYERS LOVE TO SUE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how law firms are reacting to changes in New York State law affecting the statute of limitations:

The Catholic League has been fighting discriminatory state legislation for many years, particularly when it entails the suspension of the statute of limitations for crimes involving the sexual abuse of minors.

Typically, proposed changes in law do not apply to the public sector, leaving public school victims with only 90 days to file a claim (as opposed to a year or more when the victim is a Catholic school student). We have not fought legislation that treats public entities, such as the schools, the same way it does the Catholic Church.

In New York State, the Child Victims Act was passed last year that covers all institutions, private and public: victims were given one year to file claims, no matter how long ago the alleged offense took place; it was signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in February. The evenhandedness in law, however, has not resulted in an evenhanded approach on the part of law firms seeking clients.

There is no way to tell exactly how many Catholic students and public school students in New York State have been victimized by predators over the last half century. But common sense tells us that given the sheer size of the public schools, the latter number would overwhelm the former. Yet there appears to be very little interest in soliciting clients who were abused in the public schools.

Here is a list of some law firms that are currently advertising on the internet or in the media seeking clients.

As you will see, their interest is quite selective.

www.andersonadvocates: Anti-Catholic lawyer Jeff Anderson is running radio ads advertising his services to Catholic victims. On his website, it says, "If you were sexually abused by a priest or other Catholic clergy in New York, we want to help." In other words, victims of ministers, rabbis, public school teachers, et al. can go elsewhere.

www.churchfundlawyers.com: On its website, it opens with, "Lawyers Helping You With the Catholic Church Compensation Fund."

www.fightforvictims.com: Its online posting says, "Sexual Abuse by Priests—A Victim of Child Sex Abuse?"

www.sexabuseclaimscenter.com: This is the website of Levy Konigsberg. Its heading reads, "Sexual Abuse By The Catholic Church."

www.consumersafety.org: It reads, "Sexual Abuse Claims—Priest Abuse—You Have Rights."

www.meneolawgroup.com: It flags, "Priests and Clergy Sexual Abuse in New York," offering information on "New York Dioceses Where Documented Abuse Occurred."

www.lauraahearn.com: In large letters it says, "New York State Catholic Church Priest Sexual Abuse Settlement Programs and Bringing a Civil Claim Don't Miss Deadlines."

www.hermanlaw.com: It advertises itself as "A Law Firm for Victims of Sexual Abuse." In reality, however, it focuses heavily on the Catholic Church. It boasts, "Decades Of Cover Up By the Roman Catholic Church Ends Now." It even has a "Predator Priest Index" of accused priests (there is no "Predator Teacher Index" for the public schools). It also asks the public to sign a petition demanding the Church release "Secret Predator Priest Files." What secret files? This is

pure bunk. The Catholic dioceses have been more transparent than any other institution, religious or secular. They even have their own compensation programs.

There are many other law firms that, while they do not concentrate on the Catholic Church, they nonetheless list the Church right up front.

Why, if there are that many more public school victims are these law firms concentrating so heavily on the Catholic Church? One principal reason is that the Church has a record of settling claims with dispatch, something that is not true of the public schools. For some lawyers, there is also the prospect of settling scores—the anger displayed against the Catholic Church is palpable.

What is going on is religious profiling. We know that African Americans commit more street crime, disproportionately, than whites do. If law firms advertised their services to those victimized by blacks, it would be called racial profiling. Indeed, it would be called bigotry. Bigotry is also in play when the target of sexual offenses is priests.