

[www.bishop-accountability.org/docs/requested/2002\\_03\\_30\\_VictimsMother\\_Pecharich.htm](http://www.bishop-accountability.org/docs/requested/2002_03_30_VictimsMother_Pecharich.htm)

# Letter to Bishop Brown from mother of Pecharich victim (3/30/02)

1-1 minutes

**BISHOPACCOUNTABILITY.ORG**

Documenting the Abuse Crisis  
in the Roman Catholic Church

## Frequently Requested Documents

Diocesan archives contain many documents that offer general insight into the sexual abuse crisis and the bishops' involvement.

## Victim's Mother on Pecharich in Orange

In this 2002 letter to Bishop Tod D. Brown of the Orange diocese, the mother of an alleged victim describes how Rev. Michael Pecharich ingratiated himself with her and her husband and sons "for one specific reason - young men to prey on." She is "sickened by these memories" of her sons' "outdoor adventures" with Pecharich, and she decided to write when she heard Pecharich falsely claim, when he was removed in 2002, that he had "one transgression."

March 30, 2002

Bishop Tod D. Brown  
Roman Catholic Church in Orange County  
P O Box 14195  
Orange, California 92863-1595

Dear Bishop Brown,

In 1972 my family and I were relocated to Anaheim Hills, California.

Our first Sunday found us at San Antonio Parish. Following Mass, Father Michael Pecharich greeted us and welcomed myself, my husband and our young sons to the parish. Our common ground was the Catholic Church and our [REDACTED] that indicated some cultural commonality [REDACTED]

We liked Father Pecharich. We liked his open greeting, his willingness to gather us into his fold and eagerness to be our friend.

One of my dear friends from Anaheim hills called me on March 18<sup>th</sup>. She suggested that I be seated prior to telling me some urgent & shocking news. I assumed, from her tearful demeanor, that perhaps there had been a tragedy in her family.

The news she told me was of Michael Pecharich. Knowing that Michael Pecharich and our family had been extremely close. So close, in fact, that Michael visited us after our move to [REDACTED] and then to [REDACTED] I replied to my friend, that I was not shocked by her news but certainly saddened and distressed.

I feel it is important that you know the reason I was not shocked by what my friend had to say.

(1985) When Father Michael visited us here in [REDACTED] he stated that he was disappointed that he was unable to have quality, quiet time with my youngest son (age 15 years old) This very statement alarmed me. I asked my son if everything was alright with Father Michael. My son replied that he was "extremely uncomfortable around Father Michael. He is acting too friendly". I assured my son that he needn't worry another second, his Dad and I would take the matter into our own hands.

From that moment forward we did not allow Father Michael alone with any of our sons. On the following day, his departure day, my husband took him to the airport. Not a word was spoken, nor was a good bye or thank you uttered. We never heard from Father Michael again.

50700108

## 4 Penobscot Nation men sue Catholic diocese over alleged clergy sex abuse

Judy Harrison : 6-8 minutes : 4/13/2023

*If you or someone you know needs resources or support related to sexual violence, contact the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault's 24/7 hotline at 800-871-7741.*

Four members of the Penobscot Nation have sued the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland and Bishop Robert Deeley claiming they were sexually abused when they were children by three priests assigned to St. Ann Catholic Church on Indian Island.

They are the first lawsuits filed by Native Americans against the diocese since the statute was lifted that allowed decades-old abuse claims to go forward.

The priests named in the complaints are Marcel L. Robitaille, David Paul Cote and Leo James Michaud.

Robitaille, who was removed from ministry in 1993 after relatives accused him of sexual abuse, is dead, according to Michael Bigos, the Lewiston attorney handling the men's cases. The Vatican in 2008 assigned Robitaille a life of penitence and prayer in 2008 when he was 70.



Sheldon Snell, 52, is one of four members of the Penobscot Nation have sued the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland and Bishop Robert Deeley claiming they were sexually abused when they were children by three priests assigned to St. Ann Catholic Church on Indian Island. Sitting at left is Pat Graffam, sexual assault advocate for Penobscot Nation. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

Michaud, then 51, was removed from ministry in 2002 after he was accused of abusing a teenage boy 25 years earlier while he was a seminarian working at the Christian Life Center in Caribou.

Cote retired in 2013 at age 70.

Cote and Michaud, who are believed to be still living in Maine, were not sued individually. The lawsuits claim that the diocese and its bishops knew or should have known the priests had sexually abused children and removed them from ministry sooner.

Three of the plaintiffs, Kurt D. Francis, 55, and Sheldon L. Snell, 52, both of Indian Island, and Dale N. Mitchell Sr., 62, of Orono agreed to be named publicly. The other man asked to remain anonymous.

The Bangor Daily News does not identify victims of sexual abuse unless they agree to be named.



St. Ann Catholic Church on Indian Island. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

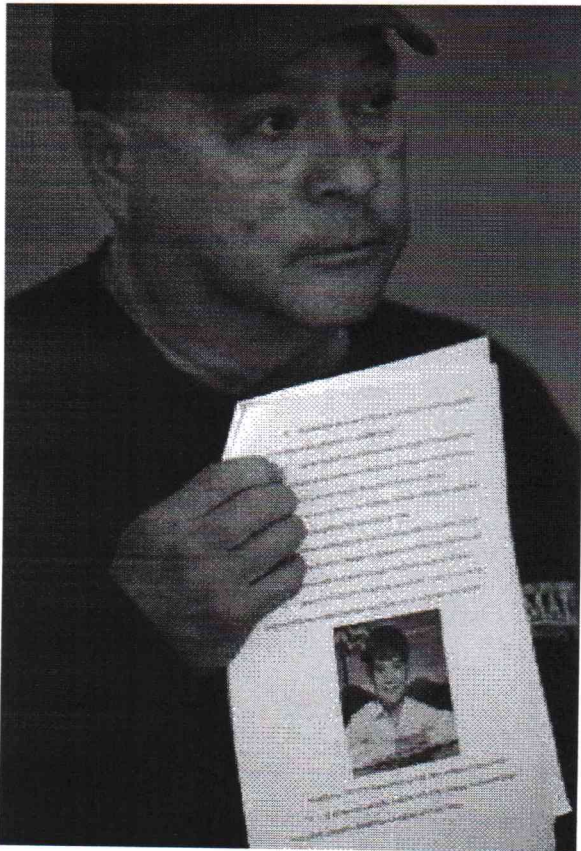
Sheldon and Francis participated in a press conference at their attorneys' Bangor offices on Thursday. Sheldon did not answer media questions and quickly left as soon as it ended.

Francis said Thursday that he learned from an article in the BDN last year that the statute of limitations had been lifted. As he read the news story, members of the abuse came flooding back to him, Francis said.

"It was hard to read," he said. "Everything came back to me and I felt a ton of weight on me. I talked to [Bigos] and that weight just lifted off of me."

Francis said he also talked to his childhood friends and realized he was not the only victim, which he had not understood before speaking with lawyers.

"I know there are more victims on Indian Island," he said. "I hope they will come forward and not be too ashamed to do that."



Kurt Francis, 55, shows a childhood photo of himself that was in the complaint filed in Penobscot Superior Court today. Four members of the Penobscot Nation have sued the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland and Bishop Robert Deeley claiming they were sexually abused when they were children by three priests assigned to St. Ann Catholic Church on Indian Island. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

Three of the victims were allegedly sexually abused between 1972 and 1979 when the men were between 7 and 12 years old, according to Bigos. In the fourth case, the abuse allegedly took place in 1987, when the victim was 16 years old.

Mitchell claims he was abused by Robitaille in the St. Ann's rectory, located next to the church, in 1972 when he was 12. Francis and the man who wishes to remain anonymous allege that Cote sexually abused them in the late 1970s when they were 10 and 11, respectively.

Snell was 16 and working as a groundskeeper at the church in 1987 when Michaud allegedly sexually assaulted him, causing serious injuries.

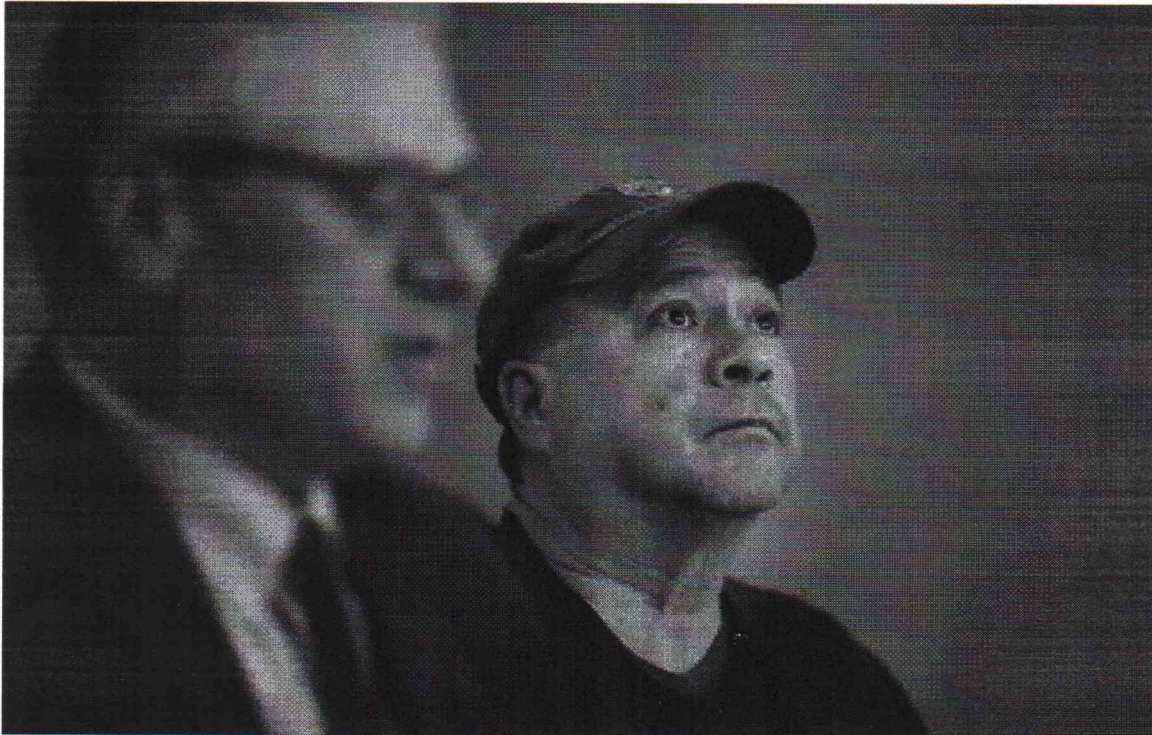
While the cases were filed Thursday in Penobscot County Superior Court, they are expected to be consolidated with more than 20 other cases pending before the Business and Consumer Court in Portland that have been filed since June.

Dave Guthro, a spokesperson for the diocese, has declined to comment on the abuse lawsuits. Attorneys for the diocese have filed motions seeking to dismiss the complaints.

Superior Court Justice Thomas McKeon, the judge handling all of the cases filed against the diocese, last week asked the Maine Supreme Judicial Court to determine if the retroactive clause in the law is constitutional and whether it may be applied to organizations and institutions rather than individuals.

The lawsuits will not go to trial until those questions are answered, but more lawsuits are expected to be filed as other victims come forward.

Bigos also has asked Maine Attorney General Aaron Frey to seek information from the diocese about the handling of sexual abuse cases and a list of names of priests against whom credible reports of childhood sexual abuse have been made that would be made public. Former attorney Steven Rowe released a similar report in 2004 that outlined some of the most egregious cases.



Kurt Francis, 55, is one of four members of the Penobscot Nation have sued the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland and Bishop Robert Deeley claiming they were sexually abused when they were children by three priests assigned to St. Ann Catholic Church on Indian Island. At left is attorney Michael Bigos, Berman & Simmons. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

The spokesperson for Frey's office did not immediately return a request for comment on Bigos' suggestion.

A change in Maine law passed in 2021 allowed people abused by clergy as children before the mid-1980s to sue. That has led to a flurry of lawsuits.

Indian Island is part of the ancestral homeland of the Penobscot Nation in Maine. Historically a part of the former Panawamské Parish, the church was established on the shores of the Penobscot River in 1668 by French-Catholic missionaries some 185 years before the establishment of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in 1853.

Today, it is part of the Parish of the Resurrection of the Lord, which is made up of churches in Old Town, Orono, Bradley and Indian Island.

# Maine Diocese Clergy Lawsuits Alleges Priest Abused Girls for Years

Irvin Jackson : 4-5 minutes : 3/10/2023

A number of women have come forward to file clergy abuse lawsuits against the Catholic church in Maine, alleging that a priest sexually assaulted young girls for nearly a decade in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

According to a report published this week in the Portland Press Herald, the complaint was filed in Maine state court on March 8, pursuing claims against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland.

Six women joined together in pursuing the Maine Diocese clergy lawsuit, each alleging that Rev. Lawrence Sabatino, a priest who died in 1990, abused girls between the ages of five and 11 from 1958 to 1967 in Lewiston and Portland, Maine.

Previously the women have been time-barred from pursuing their claims under the Maine statute of limitation. However, in 2021, Maine joined a growing number of states to pass laws repealing time limits on filing child sex abuse claims, which has allowed nearly two dozen clergy abuse lawsuits to be filed against the Catholic church diocese in Maine since the law passed.

The incidents involving Sabatino allegedly took place at St. Peter Parish in Portland, and St. Patrick Church in Lewiston. Plaintiffs say the church made no effort to protect children even after they reported incidents of abuse.

One plaintiff indicates her mother approached the church about the incidents immediately after the abuse, decades ago. However, the church responded by transferring Sabatino to St. Joseph Church in Brewer, instead of taking actions to protect children from criminal sexual assaults by one of its priests.

Sabatino was one of nine priests the church publicly confirmed as known child sex abusers in 2005. At that time, he had been the subject of more than a dozen credible reports involving sexual abuse.

## Widespread Clergy Sex Abuse In the Catholic Church

The legislation in Maine and other states came amid child sexual abuse problems throughout the Catholic Church, as well as the Boy Scouts of America, who have faced tens of thousands of lawsuits as a result. The Boy Scouts, which maintained a list of sexual predators who served as volunteers or employees of the organization, known as the "perversion files," was ultimately driven into bankruptcy by the allegations, and is still trying to negotiate a settlement which would move it out of bankruptcy.

In New York state, tens of thousands of child sex abuse lawsuits were filed against the Catholic church and other entities during a two year window in the state's state of limitations that was previously opened to allow survivors of prior assaults to pursue claims, regardless of how long ago the clergy abuse occurred. The Buffalo Diocese alone had at least 230 Catholic priests accused of sexually abusing minors, with eight specific priests accounting for more than 1,000 lawsuits filed in that part of the state.

While statute of limitations laws have also been enacted in a number of other states, including New Jersey, California and Louisiana. Other states are still debating similar bills that would allow survivors to hold abusers and entities that enabled their conduct accountable.

The Maryland sexual abuse statute of limitations is currently being considered by the legislature, following reports that uncovered hundreds of Baltimore clergy abuse cases. The Catholic church has reportedly spent at least \$200,000 lobbying against provisions of the bill, which could expose the organization and a number of individual Diocese to millions in liability.

## Boy Scout Sexual Abuse Problems Impacted More Than 12,500 Children, According to Report

Irvin Jackson : 3-4 minutes : 4/26/2019

A new report claims that more than 7,800 Boy Scout troop leaders and volunteers sexually assaulted over 12,000 victims during the past seven decades, increasing calls for the organization to provide transparency and documents commonly referred to as the “perversion files”.

The figures come from a deposition conducted earlier this year, as part of a child sex abuse case involving the Minnesota Children’s Theatre Company. The testimony of Dr. Janet Warren (PDF), a University of Virginia professor, indicated that she has been evaluating Boy Scouts of America’s handling of sexual abuse cases and indicated that between 1944 and 2016, there were 7,819 perpetrators who were either troop leaders or volunteers, believed to have abused at least 12,254 victims.

Much of that data appears to come from internal files kept by the Boy Scouts since the 1920s, known as the “perversion files,” according to allegations raised by attorney Jeff Anderson, whose firm released a list (PDF) of individuals who live in New York and worked with the Boy Scouts, who are now facing allegations of sexual misconduct.

The list includes about 150 individuals, their city, and the troop unit number they worked with, if known.

“Since the 1920’s, the Boy Scouts of America has maintained an internal filing system of scout leaders accused of misconduct, including sexual abuse. The ‘Ineligible Volunteer Files’ or ‘IV Files’ constitute five categories, including sexual misconduct, also known as ‘perversion files,’” the report states. “The files are created for individuals whose registration with the Boy Scouts has been revoked because of allegations of child sexual abuse. The ‘perversion’ files illustrate the Boy Scouts of America’s longstanding knowledge of child sexual abuse in scouting.”

In her testimony, Warren noted it has taken five years to go through all of the files of Boy Scout sexual abuse problems, and has involved the use of 32 coders. She indicated that, before the advent of computers, the Boy Scouts had 17 people in a room checking the name of every person who would register with the organization against the names in its perversion files, in an effort to keep known perpetrators out.

The Boy Scouts confirmed the existence of the files, indicating that they were used to ensure the group never knowingly allowed a sexual predator access to youths in its organization.

The number of incidents, perpetrators and victims is much higher than previously believed. Reports in 2012 indicated only about 1,247 scout leaders were suspected of abuse, while another report that same year suggested about 5,000 individuals had been expelled from the Boy Scouts due to abuse concerns.