

## **Federal judge dismisses abuse lawsuit against Vatican**

By Kevin J. Jones

Portland, Ore., Aug 21, 2012 /(CNA/EWTN News).- A federal judge dismissed a sex abuse lawsuit against the Holy See on grounds that the Vatican was not an employer of the accused ex-priest and cannot be held financially liable for the abuse.

Jeffrey Lena, counsel for the Holy See, told CNA on Aug. 21 that the ruling is “particularly important.”

It follows a years-long legal examination of whether the Vatican has sovereign immunity protecting it from such lawsuits.

On Monday U.S. District Judge Michael Mosman in Portland, Ore. ruled that the laicized Servite priest Andrew Ronan, who allegedly molested the plaintiff as a teenager in 1965 and 1966, did not have an employee-employer relationship with the Vatican.

Such a relationship was the only remaining legal justification for the lawsuit against the Vatican, Lena said.

He added that the federal court examined documents related to the case and found “no evidence that the Holy See was the employer of Ronan, or that it transferred Ronan, or that it knew of the abuse in question until after the abuse had taken place in 1965.”

He said that only the Servite order knew of the abuse until it petitioned for the laicization of Fr. Ronan in 1966.

When the Holy See learned of the abuse, Lena said, “it dismissed Ronan from the clerical state very quickly, in just five weeks.”

Judge Mosman compared the Vatican’s control over a priest to the Oregon legal bar’s control of lawyers through sanctions and disbarment but not through direct firing. He said the plaintiff’s argument that the Vatican has absolute control over all priests could mean that all Catholics could be considered Vatican employees, the Associated Press reports.

The plaintiff, named in the suit as John V. Doe, filed his case in 2002. He is represented by Minnesota attorney Jeff Anderson.

Anderson said that Ronan, who died in 1992, sexually abused children in Ireland and Chicago before being transferred to Portland, Ore. He said the abuse was kept secret from parishioners and authorities to avoid scandal.

“We believe all of the responsibility lies with the Vatican,” he said. He plans to appeal the decision.

Doe’s lawsuit against the Friar Servants of Mary is still active. His suits against the Diocese of Portland and the Archdiocese of Chicago were dismissed several years ago.