

Los Angeles School District Severs Ties With Priest Accused of Molestation

The Los Angeles Unified School District has severed its ties with a priest accused in files released by the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles of molesting a teenage girl, a district spokesman said on Monday.

Father Joseph Pina, one of dozens of priests named in 12,000 pages of records made public by the archdiocese last week after years of legal battles, was hired as a community outreach organizer by the school district in 2002, said Tom Waldman, director of media relations for the LAUSD.

Waldman said Pina, 66, was laid off last year in a wave of downsizing but continued to work occasionally at district events, a practice the spokesman said would end now that his name had surfaced in the archdiocese's **priest abuse scandal**.

"He (Pina) apparently alerted the district on Thursday that his name was included in the files," Waldman told Reuters in an interview. There was no indication Pina was ever arrested or charged in connection with the allegations.

The move marked the latest fallout from the release of the 124 personnel files, which has already led Archbishop Jose Gomez to strip his predecessor, Cardinal Roger Mahony, of all public and administrative duties.

Mahoney's former top aide, Thomas Curry, also stepped down as bishop of Santa Barbara following release of the files. Both men had been linked to efforts to conceal the abuse.

Waldman said the district was still trying to determine how Pina was hired despite the **sexual abuse** allegations against him. All new hires were fingerprinted and checked against an FBI database, he said, but if Pina did not have a criminal record he would not necessarily have been flagged.

"There's no indication whatsoever that anyone (at the school district) knew of his experiences in the archdiocese or even if he was employed there," Waldman said.

But archdiocese spokesman Tod Tamberg said that, on an employment verification form sent to LAUSD at the time, the church indicated Pina did not carry out his duties in an ethical and safe manner and that it would not hire him again.

'Not the Most Stable'

"Mr. Pina has many fine qualities, but is not the most stable of individuals. I would not recommend him for a position in the schools," a Monsignor Craig Cox wrote on the form, which was provided to Reuters.

Tamberg said Pina was also named in a report on clergy sexual abuse released by the archdiocese in 2004 and in other documents made public the following year.

Waldman said Pina worked for the district's Facilities Services Division and that his job primarily involved setting up town hall-style meetings to seek community input when a new school was being built.

"He would tend to work almost exclusively with adults – community leaders, parents, business owners and others who have a direct interest in a new school," Waldman said.

The confidential files released on Thursday show Mahony and Curry were aware as early as 1990 that a 19-year-old woman had accused Pina of molesting her over the past two-and-a-half years, starting when she was 16 or 17.

A letter from a sibling of the girl sent to church officials in 1993 accused Pina of molesting and possibly raping the

teenager. Pina admitted to Curry in 1990 that he had engaged in sexual contact with the girl but denied having intercourse with her, a memo from Curry to Mahony showed.

A notation in the church files indicates Pina was investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department over claims that he had sexually abused a 14-year-old girl in the 1970s, but never arrested or charged in that case.

Pina spent time in a residential treatment facility, according to the records, but was still an active member of the clergy as late as 1998, when he resigned as a pastor and was placed on inactive leave.

An attorney for Pina declined to comment to Reuters.

The Los Angeles archdiocese, which serves 4 million Catholics, reached a \$660 million civil settlement in 2007 with more than 500 victims of child **molestation** in the biggest such agreement of its kind in the nation. Mahony at the time called the abuse "a terrible sin and crime."

Reporting by Dan Whitcomb; editing by Cynthia Johnston and Todd Eastham.

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