

Nate's Mission: Federal lawsuit in Milwaukee charges racial disparities in treatment of black clergy abuse survivors

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WHO: Representatives of Nate's Mission, survivors of clergy abuse, Phillip Aaron (Attorney for Raphael Love), representative of Congresswoman Gwen Moore's office

WHAT: A press conference in front of the Federal Courthouse in Downtown Milwaukee where survivors of clergy abuse and a representative from the office of a prominent Black state elected official who is a survivor of childhood sexual assault will discuss racial disparities in treatment of clergy abuse victims

WHEN: Tuesday, June 8th, 11:00am

WHERE: Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse, 517 E. Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53202

WHY: A new lawsuit is being filed against the Franciscans of the Blessed Virgin Mary, headquartered in Franklin, Wisconsin, under the authority of the Milwaukee archdiocese, and the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi in the case of former Franciscan Brother Paul West, alleging discrimination and racial disparities in the treatment of Raphael Love, a Black clergy abuse victim.

Raphael, along with his brother, Joshua Love, and cousin, La Jarvis Love, [were sexually abused as children by West while they were elementary school students attending St. Francis of Assisi school](#) in Greenwood, Mississippi in the 1990s. St. Francis is a traditional Black Mission parish and school, established in the early

1950s and operated by the Milwaukee Franciscans. The abuse took place at the school in Mississippi as well as on trips to New York and Wisconsin. Although Raphael and his grandmother reported the abuse to church officials and Greenwood police in 1998, no action was taken by law enforcement.

Instead, West was transferred first to a church-run treatment facility, and then [hired by the Green Bay Diocese to teach 4th and 5th grade at St. John Nepomucene Catholic School](#) in Little Chute, Wisconsin where he taught until at least 2010. Sometime during this period, West appears to have left the Franciscan order.

In 2017, Joshua and La Jarvis Love also reported their abuse to Rev. James Gannon, the current provincial minister as well as the Diocese of Jackson. The victims were offered nominal settlements of \$15,000 in exchange for the signing of non-disclosure agreements, a practice that is prohibited by the USCCB charter established in 2002. Gannon misrepresented West's health status to dissuade the victims from seeking criminal charges and lied to the victims about the criminal statute of limitations, claiming that West could no longer be charged.

After an [investigation by the Associated Press](#) and a [letter to the U.S. Department of Justice from Congressman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi](#), West was arrested in August 2020 in Outagamie County, and two weeks later, criminal charges were issued against him in Leflore County. West has been extradited to Mississippi where he is currently awaiting trial.

The federal lawsuit demonstrates their race and economic status played a role in their treatment and the size of their settlements. Over a decade earlier, in 2006, the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi settled a handful of lawsuits with 19 victims, 17 of whom were white. The average payout amounted to \$250,000 for each survivor, over 16 times higher than the settlements paid to the Loves.

Ultimately, Joshua and La Jarvis Love signed the agreements and Raphael Love, who has been incarcerated since the age of 16, declined.

The pattern and practice of discriminatory treatment of Black Catholics and other marginalized groups is unfortunately all too common in the United States Catholic Church, as has been [demonstrated in the recent work of Black Catholic scholars](#). The barriers to reporting abuse are far greater for these survivors of clergy abuse.

Credibly accused clergy [have been transferred to predominantly Black and low-](#)

[income parishes at higher rates than predominantly white parishes](#), according to nationwide data. A similar pattern exists in which credibly accused priests have been transferred to Native American communities and schools serving disabled children. Documents released by court-order from the Milwaukee Archdiocese confirm this pattern.

Information being sought by Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul's investigation into the clergy abuse crisis and institutional response will determine the extent to which these patterns exist in Wisconsin's Catholic dioceses and religious orders. Last week, the [Milwaukee archdiocese announced it will not cooperate](#) with the Kaul's investigation, claiming that they are the true targets of discrimination.

A federal civil case has also been filed against West and the Franciscans in the Southern District of New York, which also alleges that West and the Franciscans have violated the federal Mann Act, which prohibits the transport of children over state lines for the purposes of sexual assault.

Survivors, their friends and family, or anyone who has information about the church's response to abuse are encouraged to report clergy and faith leader abuse online at SupportSurvivors.wisconsin.gov or by calling 1-877-222-2620.