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by The Associated Press

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The mother of a Michigan teenager who killed himself is suing the Archdiocese of Detroit for the alleged harm she suffered during his funeral when a priest questioned whether her son would go to heaven.

The lawsuit filed Thursday in Wayne County on behalf of the teen's mother, Linda Hullibarger, names as defendants the archdiocese, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish and the Rev. Don LaCuesta.

Hullibarger and her husband, Jeff, said they met with LaCuesta in December 2018 to plan funeral services for their 18-year-old son, Maison, and made it clear they wanted the priest to deliver a positive and uplifting message that celebrated the life of their son, according to the complaint.

The suit alleges LaCuesta instead turned his Dec. 8, 2018, homily into a message regarding suicide, questioning whether the teen would go to heaven, The Blade in Toledo, Ohio, reported.

Linda Hullibarger said in a statement that she and her family had "no idea, no indication that was going to happen."

The Bedford, Michigan, family had not disclosed the nature of the youth's death to the priest, according to the suit.

"No parent, no sibling, no family member, should ever, ever have to sit through what we sat through. And it's happened before. When you're already beyond devastated, why would you make it even worse? No words can describe that (because) you don't think you could feel any worse," Hullibarger added in the statement released by Charles E. Boyk Law Offices LLC.

Death by suicide has been considered sinful by the Catholic Church and other religions for centuries, but the church has softened its stance in recent decades.

Following her son's funeral service, Linda Hullibarger sought LaCuesta's removal. According to her lawsuit, a call with Bishop Gerard Battersby confirmed that church officials believed that what LaCuesta did was wrong but would not remove him.

Hullibarger's attorneys said in their statement that the lawsuit "seeks to hold Father LaCuesta, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, and The Archdiocese of Detroit accountable for the actions of Father LaCuesta and to ensure no further harm to the parish and local community."

The archdiocese said Thursday in a statement that it does not comment on pending litigation and referred to its December 2018 statement on the priest's actions.

In that statement, the archdiocese said in part that it acknowledges "that the family expected a homily based on how their loved one lived, not one addressing how he passed away. We also know the family was hurt further by Father's choice to share Church teaching on suicide, when the emphasis should have been placed more on God's closeness to those who mourn."

"Father LaCuesta agrees that the family was not served as they should have been served," the release from the archdiocese continued. "For the foreseeable future, he will not be preaching at funerals and he will have all other homilies reviewed by a priest mentor."

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