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The Associated Press

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The Legion of Christ, a Roman Catholic order disgraced by sexual abuse committed by its founder and other clergy, is facing new allegations of molestation of children in lawsuits filed in April in Connecticut, where it is based.

Five men and a woman sued the order in federal court on April 14 and 15, saying they were victims of sexual crimes when they attended schools run by the Legion of Christ in New Hampshire and Rhode Island in the 1990s when they were children.

A spokesperson for the order said April 26 that it was reviewing the complaints.

"The Legionaries of Christ respect everyone who comes forth with these types of allegations and are committed to creating and maintaining a safe environment for all children and all people who interact with its members and are involved in its ministries," spokesperson Gail Gore said.

The five men allege they were fondled and subjected to other abuse while attending the Immaculate Conception Apostolic School in Center Harbor, New Hampshire. The woman claims a staff member exposed himself to her when she attended Immaculate Conception Academy in South Kingstown, Rhode Island.

The men, known in court documents as John Does 1 through 5, are from Grants Pass, Oregon, Bellevue, Ohio, Sacramento, California, Fenton, Michigan, and Immokalee, Florida. The woman is from Auburn, California.

Three of the men allege they were abused by a member of the order. A fourth says he was molested by another member of the legion. The fifth man alleges he was abused by another student at the New Hampshire school. The woman says a legion member exposed himself to her at the Rhode Island academy.

The Legion of Christ, headquartered in Cheshire, Connecticut, has faced legal battles in the U.S. stemming from the fallout of a sexual abuse scandal involving the order's founder, the late Rev. Marcial Maciel, and church officials. A church investigation determined Maciel sexually molested seminarians and fathered three children. The Vatican took over the order in 2010, and Pope Benedict XVI ordered wholesale reform.

In a report released last month, the order said 27 Legion of Christ priests were known to have committed sexual abuse from 1941 to 2020, representing 2% of the 1,380 order members ordained to priesthood around the world throughout the order's history. The report also said there were about 170 minors who were sexually abused by the priests.

Two of the priests were convicted in criminal courts, three died without being tried and the others have not been prosecuted, the report said. Sixteen of the 27 priests were sanctioned by the church, and another eight are facing disciplinary proceedings.

In 2019, the Legion of Christ acknowledged that four priests at the New Hampshire school, which closed in 2015, had abused students.

In 2012, the Rhode Island school closed after dozens of women said they endured psychological abuse that led to multiple cases of anorexia, stress-induced migraines, depression and suicidal thoughts.

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