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N4T Investigators: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints respond to civil complaint

 January 19, 2021  6:00 pm  Lupita Murillo

LOCAL NEWS, N4T INVESTIGATORS, TOP STORIES

TUCSON (KVOA) – It is a shocking case of child sexual abuse the [News 4 Tucson Investigators reported about last month](#).

A Bisbee father has been accused of abusing his own children and showcasing the acts on the dark web.

Since the accusations surfaced, claims have been made against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Tucson attorney, Lynne Cadigan.

She represents some of the victims. Cadigan claimed church leaders knew about the abuse and did not report it to police.

A 19-page document was just filed in Cochise County in response to an 87-page civil complaint filed in November by Cadigan.

It detailed the abuse and the attorney claimed the church stood by and did nothing to help the children.

"The church admitted they knew there was sexual abuse," Cadigan said. "And also in their answer, they claimed they didn't have a duty to do anything about it other than encourage the perpetrator himself to report it."

Cadigan also referred to recently filed document that stated,

"plaintiffs' claims against defendants are barred in whole or in part because defendants owed them no duty."

The response comes in the case of Paul Adams.

Three of his children filed a claim against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and some of its members.

Adams and his wife, Leizza, were indicted in 2017 on a total of 27 counts of multiple charges involving sex crimes against children.

"Since when do perpetrators turn themselves in willingly?" Cadigan said.

Adams was a Border Patrol agent.

He was caught after the Center for Missing and Exploited Children identified him in sexually explicit content with his children found on the internet.

He committed suicide inside a jail cell before he could stand trial.

In 2018, his wife pleaded no contest to two counts of child abuse endangerment. Leizza was sentenced to two years in prison and was released last fall.

Since our report first aired in December, an individual who attended church with Leizza and Paul Adams came forward and gave a sworn statement saying it was well-known within the church that Paul Adams " ... was abusing his children and referred to this abuse as " Paul Adams misbehaving."

The individual went on to say, "I feel terrible that no one reported this abuse for all those years. We believed bishop would take care of it, as he knew about it."

The statement further reads, "I was told to trust in the bishop and the church, and that the bishop and the church would take care of family and abuse issues, not the government or police."

News 4 Tucson Investigators spoke to this individual over the phone.

They asked us not to reveal their identity for fear of retribution. We asked them if they knew this abuse was going on, why didn't they go to authorities and report it?

The answer - "We all truly believed the bishop would take care of it."

Under Arizona state law there is "Clergy Privilege."

That is when clergy learn about abuse in confidential communication and don't have to report it to authorities.

The church stated they learned of Adam's behavior from Adams himself in this way.

In November, the church sent us this statement, it reads in part:

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no tolerance for abuse of any kind. Our hearts ache for all survivors of abuse and go out to the victims in this case. This tragic abuse was perpetrated by the young victims' own father who died of suicide in jail while awaiting trial. As clergy, the bishop was required by Arizona law to maintain the confidentiality of the father's limited confession. Notwithstanding, the bishop took the few details he had and made efforts to protect the children, primarily through the mother. The bishop urged the family to report the abuse or give him consent to do so, but they refused. The bishop also convened a church disciplinary council and condemned the limited conduct he knew of in the strongest terms by excommunicating Mr. Adams from the church in 2013. It was not until law enforcement made an arrest of the father that the bishop learned of the scope and magnitude of the abuse that far exceeded anything he had heard or suspected. The church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its clergy worked to handle this matter appropriately consistent with Arizona law. It has also tried to assist the victims and remains willing to commit significant resources to aid and assist these children. The church will continue to offer assistance to these young victims."

Sam Penro; Media Relations Manager, Church Communication Department; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

When contacting attorneys representing the church, church officials told News 4 Tucson they have nothing to add to their prior statement.



Lupita Murillo

Lupita Murillo is an investigative reporter. She is part of the Digging Deeper team that uncovers important issues focusing on crime that affects the community.

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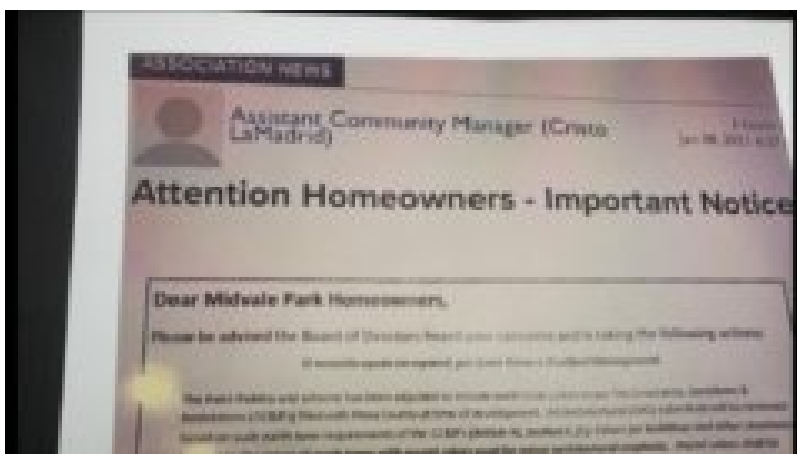
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