

Former altar boy sues Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta over sexual assault allegations

The lawsuit claims the boy was sexually assaulted while volunteering as an altar boy at St. Joseph's Church in Dalton.

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A former altar boy at St. Joseph's Church in Whitfield County has filed a lawsuit against the church, the Archdiocese of Atlanta and former priest Douglas Edwards, claiming that he was sexually assaulted by Edwards in the '70s.

The plaintiff, referred to in the lawsuit as Philip Doe, was an altar boy at St. Joseph's from ages 12 to 15, according to the lawsuit. Edwards was the supervisor of the altar boys and servers, and oversaw the day-to-day operations of the church.

Doe claims that Edwards sexually molested him about eight to 10 times between 1976 and 1978. He claims Edwards fondled him and performed sexual acts – and some of the alleged abuse occurred at a home Edwards owned on Lake Allatoona, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit states that the victim, now in his fifties, suffered “a lifetime of emotional and psychological problems as a result of the abuse.”

The Archdiocese of Atlanta is accused of actively engaging in efforts to hide claims of sexual molestation by local priests, including Edwards, and protecting those priests from criminal prosecution.

This comes after the Archdiocese of Atlanta released the names of 15 priests credibly accused of sexually abusing children, in claims dating back to 1956. Edwards was included on that list and worked at 16 parishes throughout his career, including churches and schools in Atlanta.

According to attorney Darren Penn, the victim is a husband and family man. Penn said he decided to come forward after seeing the recent outpouring of support for victims of abuse at the hands of Catholic priests.

RELATED: [Archdiocese of Atlanta releases names of priests accused of sexually assaulting children](#)

According to records, Edwards was a priest at St. Joseph's in Dalton from 1976-1981. Edwards died in 1997.

“The Archdiocese and Archbishop of Atlanta owed a duty of reasonable care to protect minor parishioners who were altar boys at St. Joseph’s Church,” said Darren Penn, who is representing Philip Doe in this lawsuit. “We urge the Attorney General to launch an investigation into the Archdiocese to get to the truth about all of the clergy credibly accused of sexual misconduct in Georgia and ensure the public is properly informed.”

Doe’s lawsuit asks for unspecified damages to be determined at trial.

The Archdiocese of Atlanta has not responded to 11Alive’s request for comment.