

Father Leonardo Mateo

Imesch wonders if damage of abuse is “Permanent”

Molester claims parents are on a witch hunt

More than a dozen victims span three states

Father Leonardo Mateo, a priest born, raised and ordained in the Philippines, began sexually abusing children within days of his arrival in Los Angeles. While his early history in the Philippines is unknown, his document trail in the United States begins soon after his arrival in the Los Angeles Archdiocese in 1959.

In the ensuing years, Mateo bounced back and forth between the US and the Philippines, reportedly abusing children in Joliet and Chicago, and Tagbilaran, Philippines. A police report from Glen Ellyn shows that Mateo skirted prosecution once, but the priest was allowed to continue to work with kids. He lived in Joliet from 1977 to 1985.

More allegations against Mateo began rolling into the Joliet Diocese in 1991. Parents were enraged to learn that the priest, who admitted to molesting boys in swimming pools was still living in a parish as working as a priest in a Chicago VA hospital. Mateo admits to some of the abuse. Victims also said they were abused at the movies and in Mateo’s room. Fellow priests witnessed boys entering and exiting Mateo’s room, but did nothing.

Over the next few months, Bishop Imesch, Bishop Kaffer and other church officials wrote letters and memos wondering about enraged parents who want to learn more about Mateo’s past. Imesch also openly wonders whether the abuse to Mateo’s victims is permanent. Despite all of this, Bishop Kaffer did not report to law enforcement, saying that the victims were over age 16. Many of the victims known to the diocese were as young as 10.

Although Imesch worries that if Mateo returns to the Philippines, it will look like a statement of guilt, the cleric’s faculties are revoked. Mateo returned to the Archdiocese of Cebu in the 1990s, where he died in 2004.

TIMELINE OF DOCUMENTS – LEONARDO MATEO

3/17/56 – Ordained

1956-1959 - Assistant Pastor, Cathedral, Tagbilaran City, Philippines

1959-1960 – In residence, St. Vibiana’s and St. Anastasia’s, Los Angeles. Student at Loyola Marymount University

1960-1965 – Hospital Chaplain, Greenpoint Hospital, Brooklyn, NY

1965-1975 – Diocesan Procurator, Diocese of Tagbilaran, Philippines

1981 Handwritten notes from approximately this time period say that when Mateo was at Glen Ellyn “we” got a call and we got him professional help. The police and family agreed. “The one incident he knew of, inappropriate action.” (61)

1983 Allegation of sexual abuse by Mateo. Police did not prosecute but opted to allow Mateo to go into counseling. (21)

11/82-2/84 – Associate, St. Petronille, Glen Ellyn, IL

2/1984 – Diocese of Richmond, VA

1985 – Hines Veterans’ Hospital, Chicago, IL

1985 – Returned to Philippines

10/28/91 Summary of confrontation of Mateo by parents of boys Mateo abused. Mateo did not deny the allegations. He said he only lives at St. Bede’s parish is no longer around children and works for the Veterans Administration. Mateo said that the last time he abused children was about 10 years prior when he was at IC in Elmhurst. Mateo said that even though St. Bede’s has a school he does not go in it. He admits to one time abusing the boys in which he fondled them at a movie theater and abusing one other boy at a YMCA swimming pool. Later he admits there were probably a few boys that he touched in the pool and that his biggest problem was when he was in the pool. Mateo says he may have been abused by his father and was abused by a priest while in seminary. (66-70)

12/5/91 Summary of another confrontation between parents of boys abused by Mateo and Mateo. Parents say their sons describe more sexual contact than what Mateo admitted to in the first confrontation. Also describe Mateo giving gifts to boys on a regular basis and other ways he abused boys. Mateo denied these allegations. (71)

12/6/91 Memo from father of abused boys to Fr. Riva, intending to have the memo forwarded to Bishop Imesch. Explains the father’s interviews with Mateo. Father does not think Mateo received adequate treatment for his sexual abuses and may still be abusing children. He wants to see the parish records and diocese records on Mateo, including his personnel file and to know the truth about what the Diocese knew about Mateo. Also asks that Mateo not be allowed to return to the Philippines until action is taken by the victims, he be removed from the priesthood, and for compensation for his sons. (76-77)

12/7/91 Memo from Bishop Roger Kaffer re: Mateo about Mateo’s abuse of two boys and that there may be others boys who Mateo molested. (78-79)

12/9/91 Father of sexual abuse survivors report abuse of Mateo to Bishop Kaffer. (80-81)

- 12/10/91 Memo from Bishop Kaffer of conversation with Father of sexual abuse survivors. Notes that he does not need to report the abuse to the Department of Children and Family Services because the boys were not under 16 at the time of the abuse. (83-85)
- 12/12/91 Memo from the Chancellor for the Diocese, Fr. Kealy to Bishop Zafra re: Mateo. Mateo has been living in the Archdiocese of Chicago since 1985 and working as a chaplain at the VA hospital. Before that he experienced “psychological stress” resulting in fondling a 10 year old boy. Recent review of his file resulted in withdrawal of Mateo’s faculties. Asks Zafra about any difficulties Mateo had while in the Philippines. (90)
- 12/12/91 Letter from Bishop Kaffer to the father of the survivors of abuse by Mateo. Kaffer says their attorney confirmed that the Diocese does not need to report the case to DCFS. Mateo had a positive recommendation from the Philippines. After Mateo left Immaculate Conception there was a report about his behavior that was settled between the family and police. Kaffer cannot grant his request to see Mateo’s files. They have no authority to prevent him from leaving the country but will urge him to stay. (91-92)
- 12/13/91 Memo from James Byrne after interview with Mateo about the sexual abuse allegations against him. Mateo denies sexual contact with the reporting victims or with anyone else. Mateo said he was returning to the Philippines for Christmas but that he would return. Byrne urged him to return or him not coming back could be interpreted as guilt. (97-104)
- 12/13/91 Memo from Bishop Kaffer re: conversation with the father of the survivors of abuse by Mateo. The father recently spoke with Fr. Wilkening, who said he always feared there were more children and the deal in 1983 involved two brothers and the police handled it. (106-107)
- 12/16/91 Letter from Aux Bishop Roque to Mateo withdrawing his priestly faculties and permission for him to reside in a rectory in the Archdiocese of Chicago. (115)
- 1/15/92 Memo re: Mateo says that Mateo resigned and will be returning to the Philippines.
- 1/16/92 Letter from Mateo to Bishop Kaffer saying he is angry at the church and he was forced to retire. (154)
- 3/23/92 Memo from Bishop Kaffer about a report from a mother whose sons were sexually abused by Mateo. (180)
- 3/27/92 Memo from Bishop Kaffer on his conversation with Fr. Nitzke. Nitzke had no concerns about Mateo when they lived together, although he did see kids going into Mateo’s room. There were no concerns since Mateo was in charge of the altar boys. (184)

- 7/30/93 Letter from Bishop Imesch to Mateo in the Philippines asking, at the request of the father of survivors of abuse by Mateo, for the names of students with whom he may have had sexual contact. (230-231)
- 8/7/93 Letter from Mateo to Bishop Imesch responding to his request for names of those he sexually abused. Says the father is on a witch hunt. Says the father is disappointed in the way his children turned out and is looking for a scapegoat. Mateo does not provide any names. (232)
- 9/27/93 Letter from parishioners to Bishop Imesch concerned that Mateo may have abused their son when he was at Immaculate Conception. Mateo abused some of their son's friends and they now have serious psychological issues. They say the Diocese's solution, which is to wait for those men to come forward, is unacceptable. Also says the Diocese is not permitting Immaculate Conception to notify all parents of kids who were in the groups led by Mateo and accuses the Diocese of criminal actions. (241)
- 10/21/93 Letter from Bishop Imesch to parishioners in response to their letter. Says they have attempted to contact individuals affected by Mateo and given their experience with those who have been abused by priests "there seems to be little reluctance in coming forward to press charges." Also questions whether damage done to victims is permanent. (242-243)
- 1/28/94 Letter from Immaculate Conception parishioners who wrote in September responding to Bishop Imesch's letter back to them. The Diocese says they were not aware of everything that happened at the parish until much later, but the parishioners ask why Mateo was suddenly transferred with no goodbye or party. Also question why the Diocese has not made an announcement in the parish or contacted the boys who were around Mateo. (260-261)
- 4/11/02 Email from survivor about sexual misconduct by Mateo when he was a priest at St. Petronille parish in Glen Ellyn, IL in 1982. Mateo abused at least 3 others. (13)
- 4/13/02 Email regarding Mateo. Says he took showers with boys. Someone else emailed the Diocese reporting abuse by Mateo and has not received a response. Email says the Diocese should respond to the report of abuse. (14)
- 4/16/02 Email from survivor questioning why the Diocese cannot locate Mateo in the Philippines and expressing concern that he is around children there. (16)
- 4/17/02 Letter from Bishop Kaffer to Bishop Tumalak in the Diocese of Tagbilaran, Philippines notifying him that the Diocese of Joliet continues to get reports of abuse by Mateo. Says if Mateo is still alive he should not be around children. (281)

- 8/11/02 Report of abuse by Mateo when survivor was a child. (21)
- 8/19/02 Report of abuse by Mateo when survivor was a child. (21)
- 10/4/02 Mary Ann Jury (?) writes to Bishop Imesch informing him that she has heard from the father of a boy who was sexually abused by a priest at St. Pet's in Glen Ellyn when Fr. Cullen was the priest there. The boy claims there were 3 or 4 others who were involved. The priest who was involved went back out of the country. (20)
- Undated Letter from father of survivors of sexual abuse by Mateo to parishioners at Immaculate Conception church in Elmhurst. Summarizes the claims of abuse against Mateo and the Diocese's investigation into those claims. (221-223)