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After a lawsuit alleging sexual abuse decades ago at Maryville Academy, a Lake Zurich priest is placed on leave for the third time



The Rev. David Ryan, then assistant executive director of Maryville Academy, spoke to the media about the alleged trouble at the facility on July 10, 2003. (James Branaman/Chicago Tribune)



The letter arrived in late July with the tone of the two before it, the ones that announced the [Rev. David Ryan](#), a longtime Chicago-area priest, had been placed on leave amid allegations of child sexual abuse.

This one, like those previous, came with a sense of the somber, an acknowledgment of the severity of the accusations and a reminder of the presumption of innocence.

The letter was dated July 29, with Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, the archbishop of Chicago, addressing the St. Francis de Sales parish community in Lake Zurich. It marked at least the third time since 2020 that Cupich had sent such a note acknowledging the accusations that have embroiled Ryan.

The cardinal opened this latest letter with a line that now felt familiar amid controversy that refuses to fade:



The archdiocese first placed Ryan on leave in [2020 amid allegations](#) that he abused a minor at [Maryville Academy](#), then a church-run home for troubled youth in Des Plaines. He was reinstated in September 2021, only for Cupich to address the congregation days later with the revelation of “additional information, not previously provided ... that will mean delaying Father Ryan’s return.”



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In February, 2023, he was reinstated, again, with Cupich making a plea:

“We must keep our word,” he wrote, “and do everything possible to restore Fr. Ryan’s good name.”

Now there’s another allegation that in the mid-1990s, during his years on staff at Maryville Academy, Ryan sexually abused a child. The allegation is part of a civil complaint that Chicago lawyer Mike Grieco filed against Maryville last week in Cook County.

These days, Grieco, 35, describes a sense of urgency surrounding the matter. He said he has tried to “push the archdiocese” to examine testimony that Ryan recently provided in a deposition concerning the alleged abuse at Maryville. Grieco said he questioned Ryan in June at the office of Ryan’s defense attorney and that Ryan’s answers reflected “the issues on campus” at Maryville during his tenure there.

Ryan’s attorney did not respond to requests for comment.

Most of those allegations surround the Rev. John P. Smyth, a Chicago archdiocese priest who spent more than 40 years in leadership roles at Maryville, including that of executive director. Smyth, who left Maryville in 2004, [died in April 2019](#), around the time accusers began to emerge claiming that he'd sexually abused them when they were children.

Lawsuits that Grieco and his firm filed in recent months detail sordid accusations against Smyth, including those of rape and molestation. Ryan served as Smyth's co-director at Maryville in the 1990s, when much of the abuse is alleged to have occurred.

In the complaint filed last week, a former Maryville resident, identified in court documents as John Doe 6, alleged that he was sexually abused by Smyth and Ryan after being placed at Maryville in 1996. The lawsuit states the alleged abuse took place for about a year when the boy was around 11 years old.

The filing also contains accusations from nearly a dozen other victims, identified only by number. Victim No. 11, as the lawsuit describes him, claimed that Smyth and Ryan made him "feel like a 'sex slave'" while he lived at Maryville.

John Doe 6 is "working through" the trauma detailed in the lawsuit, Grieco said.

Grieco and his associates have been "trying to build as much credibility and rapport as we can with him, to (help him to) open up," the attorney said.

"You know, people don't want to talk about this stuff," Grieco said. "They don't want to trust somebody new. They don't want to do it if they don't think it's going to actually bring justice. I think he's struggling from an emotional perspective. He's a single guy, no family, but he's kind of working through it, and he's been in some therapy, as well."

The previous allegations against Ryan led to suspensions but, ultimately, his reinstatement as pastor at St. Francis de Sales, where he was first appointed in 2006 and reappointed in 2012. In 2023, upon Ryan's most recent reinstatement, Cupich in his letter to the church community cited a lack of cooperation from Ryan's accusers.



The Rev. David Ryan, left, pastor at St. Francis de Sales Catholic Parish in Lake Zurich, leads a blessing of the truck and donated contents destined for people in Tampa, Florida, who were affected by Hurricane Milton on Oct. 19, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

Cupich referenced what he described as a “thorough investigation” by the archdiocese before reaching his decision to reinstate Ryan. Contacted by email about the most recent allegations against Ryan, an archdiocese spokesperson wrote that “we do not comment on investigations” but shared a flowchart detailing its internal investigative process.

According to the document, allegations of child sexual abuse first make their way into the archdiocese’s Office for the Protection of Children & Youth, which then launches a child abuse and investigations review. In addition to being investigated for its veracity, the allegation is shared with law enforcement and the archbishop at the review stage.

The archdiocese’s Independent Review Board evaluates the investigation and then “determines whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse occurred.” In the final part of the process, the IRB makes a recommendation to the archbishop about the accused individual’s “fitness for ministry.”

In his 2023 letter, Cupich wrote that Ryan’s accusers “refused to cooperate with both civil and church investigations.” As a result, he wrote, “the IRB finds that there is not sufficient reason to suspect Father Ryan is guilty of sexually

“Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that I have accepted this recommendation and I am reinstating Father Ryan as your pastor, effective immediately.”

Grieco said Ryan’s newest accuser is willing to cooperate with investigators, and that “we are setting a date for the (archdiocese) review board to take his statement.” The alleged victim will also provide a statement to police, said Grieco, who expressed skepticism about the archdiocese’s ability or willingness to investigate Ryan.

“I believe there’s some bias to it,” Grieco said, arguing that “the process needs to go beyond, ‘Did you do it?’

“That’s not a question and answer session that gets to the truth.”

He said he “would encourage (the archdiocese) to look at this holistically, too” and take into account the troubled history at Maryville. It [opened in 1883](#) as St. Mary’s Training School, an orphanage that “was a place for dependent and neglected boys,” according to its website. It began accepting girls in 1911.

In the early 2000s, a series of “grim headlines,” as the Tribune characterized them at the time, rocked the campus. A 14-year-old died by suicide and was found hanging in a shower. An 11-year-old was allegedly raped.

Smyth, the longtime priest who was then the executive director, resigned in disgrace. Fifteen years later, in 2019, allegations of sustained and habitual sexual abuse emerged — first levied at Smyth and then his longtime right hand, Ryan.

Megan Biasco, the director of development at Maryville, wrote in an email last week that “our mission is to protect children.”

“We were made aware of the allegations from more than 20 years ago,” she wrote. “We are looking into it.”

The accusations have reopened old wounds, if they ever healed. In his most recent letter to the St. Francis de Sales community, Cupich referenced the recent past: that both Ryan and his church have “experience with our processes for handling allegations” concerning child sexual abuse.

Cupich wrote that Ryan “strenuously denies this allegation. and states that he

In the civil complaints he has filed, meanwhile, Grieco and his team have referenced a tortured past and the difficulty the Catholic Church has had confronting a notorious [legacy of child sexual abuse](#). Some of the filings reference a report Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, then the archbishop of Chicago, commissioned in 1992 that offered a plan for addressing “clerical sexual misconduct” involving children.

Among those interviewed for the report was Smyth, who then was more than 20 years into his tenure as the executive director at Maryville. Smyth told the report’s authors that “the archdiocese invests considerable resources in the seminary system, but virtually nothing to support and supervise priests after ordination.”

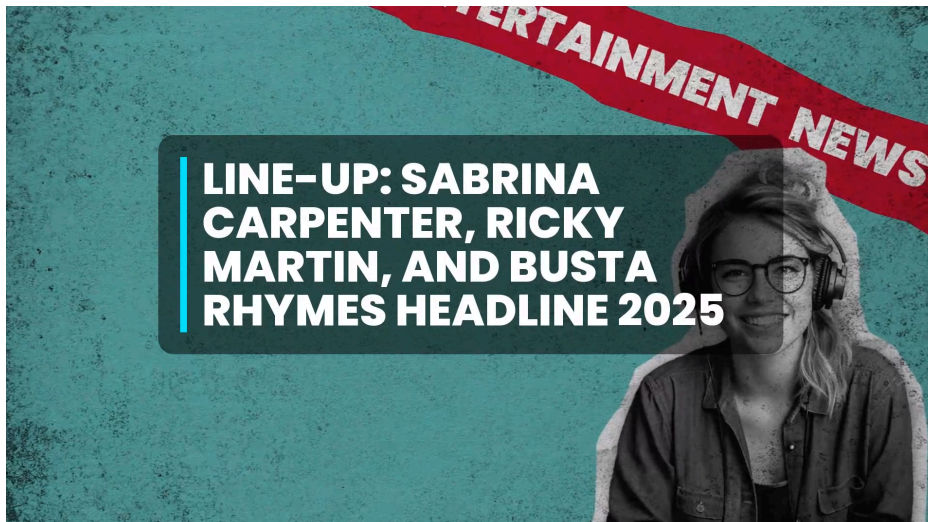
According to the lawsuit, Smyth said that “priests are vulnerable to false accusations.”

But also, that “some children can be seductive, and priests naive.”

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