

NEW YORK STATE SUPREME COURT
ERIE COUNTY

-----X
SCOTT YERGER,

Plaintiff,

-against-

DIOCESE OF BUFFALO and ST. MARY OF THE LAKE
CHURCH AND SCHOOL,

Defendants.
-----X

Index No.: _____

Date Filed: November 6, 2019

SUMMONS

Plaintiff designates Erie County as the place of trial.

The basis of venue is one defendant's residence.

Child Victims Act Proceeding
22 NYCRR 202.72

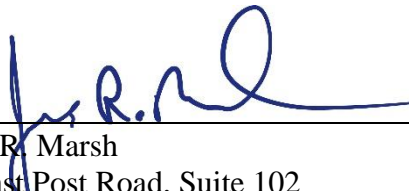
TO THE ABOVE NAMED DEFENDANTS:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED to answer the complaint in this action and to serve a copy of your answer, or, if the complaint is not served with this summons, to serve a notice of appearance, on the plaintiff's attorneys within 20 days after the service of this summons, exclusive of the day of service (or within 30 days after the service is complete if this summons is not personally delivered to you within the State of New York); and in case of your failure to appear or answer, judgment will be taken against you by default for the relief demanded in the complaint.

Dated: November 6, 2019

Respectfully Yours,

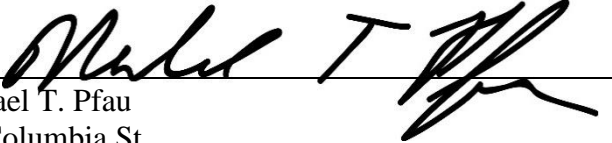
MARSH LAW FIRM PLLC

By  _____
James R. Marsh
151 East Post Road, Suite 102
White Plains, NY 10601-5210
Phone: 929-232-3235
jamesmarsh@marsh.law

Jennifer Freeman
151 East Post Road, Suite 102
White Plains, NY 10601-5210
Phone: 929-232-3128
jenniferfreeman@marsh.law

Robert Y. Lewis
151 East Post Road, Suite 102
White Plains, NY 10601-5210
Phone: 646-306-2145
robertlewis@marsh.law

PFAU COCHRAN VERTETIS AMALA PLLC

By 
Michael T. Pfau
403 Columbia St.
Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206-462-4335
michael@pcvalaw.com
Pro hac vice forthcoming

Jason P. Amala
403 Columbia St.
Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206-462-4339
jason@pcvalaw.com
Pro hac vice forthcoming

Anelga Doumanian
31 Hudson Yards
11th Floor Suite 36
New York, NY 10001
Phone: 206-330-0215
adoumanian@pcvalaw.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff

NEW YORK STATE SUPREME COURT
ERIE COUNTY

-----X
SCOTT YERGER,

Index No.: _____/___

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff,

-against-

DIOCESE OF BUFFALO and ST. MARY OF THE LAKE
CHURCH AND SCHOOL,

Child Victims Act Proceeding
22 NYCRR 202.72

Defendants.

Plaintiff Scott Yerger, by and through his attorneys, the Marsh Law Firm PLLC and Pfau Cochran Vertetis Amala PLLC, respectfully alleges for his complaint the following:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Diocese of Buffalo (the “Diocese”) knew for decades that its priests, clergy, teachers, school administrators, employees, and volunteers were using their positions within the Diocese to groom and to sexually abuse children. Despite that knowledge, the Diocese failed to take reasonable steps to protect children from being sexually abused and actively concealed the abuse.

2. Since 2018, following decades of denial and cover-up, the Diocese of Buffalo began releasing the names of priests who were accused of sexually abusing children. While the Diocese of Buffalo has listed at least 80 priests with substantiated claims of sexual abuse of a minor, it has been reported that there are well over a 100 clergy in the Diocese of Buffalo who have faced allegations of sexually abusing a child. Based on the Diocese’s wrongful conduct, a reasonable person could and would conclude that it knowingly and recklessly disregarded the abuse of children and chose to protect its reputation and wealth over those who deserved protection. The result is not surprising: for decades hundreds, if not thousands, of children were

sexually abused by Catholic clergy and others who served the Diocese. The plaintiff in this lawsuit is one of many children who was sexually abused because of the Diocese's wrongful conduct.

II. PROCEEDING IN ACCORDANCE WITH CPLR 214-G AND 22 NYCRR 202.72

3. This complaint is filed pursuant to the Child Victims Act (CVA) 2019 Sess. Law News of N.Y. Ch. 11 (S. 2440), CPLR 214-G, and 22 NYCRR 202.72. The CVA opened a historic one-year one-time window for victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse in the State of New York to pursue lapsed claims. Prior to the passage of the CVA, plaintiff's claims were time-barred the day he turned 22 years old. The enactment of the CVA allows victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse, for the first time in their lives, to pursue restorative justice in New York State.

III. PARTIES

4. Plaintiff Scott Yerger is an adult male who currently resides in Tonawanda, NY.

5. Upon information and belief, the Diocese is currently a not-for-profit religious corporation organized under New York law with its principal office in Buffalo, New York.

6. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese conducted business as the "Diocese of Buffalo" and/or "Buffalo Diocese."

7. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese employed priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or others who served various Catholic institutions and families, including plaintiff Scott Yerger and his family.

8. Upon information and belief, Father Fred Fingerle ("Father Fingerle") was a priest employed by the Diocese to serve Catholic families, including plaintiff Scott Yerger and his family. During the time Father Fingerle was employed by the Diocese, he used his position as a priest to groom and to sexually abuse plaintiff Scott Yerger.

9. To the extent that the Diocese was a different entity, corporation, or organization during the period of time during which Father Fingerle used his position as a priest to sexually abuse plaintiff Scott Yerger, such entity, corporation, or organization is hereby on notice that it is intended to be a defendant in this lawsuit.

10. To the extent the Diocese is a successor to a different entity, corporation, or organization which existed during the period of time during which Father Fingerle used his position as a priest to sexually abuse plaintiff Scott Yerger, such predecessor entity, corporation, or organization is hereby on notice that it is intended to be a defendant in this lawsuit.

11. All such Diocese-related entities, corporations, or organizations are collectively referred to herein as the "Diocese."

12. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times defendant St. Mary of the Lake Church and School ("St. Mary's") was a not-for-profit religious corporation organized under New York law and wholly owned, operated, and controlled by the Diocese.

13. Upon information and belief, St. Mary's is currently a not-for-profit religious corporation organized under New York law with its principal office in Hamburg, New York.

14. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's conducted business as "St. Mary of the Lake Church and School," "St. Mary of the Lake Church," "St. Mary of the Lake School," "St. Mary of the Lake Parish," "St. Mary of the Lake," and/or "St. Mary's."

15. St. Mary's is a parish with a church and school located in Hamburg, New York.

16. Upon information and belief, Father Fred Fingerle was a priest employed by St. Mary's to serve Catholic families in its geographic jurisdiction, including plaintiff Scott Yerger and his family. During the time Father Fred Fingerle was employed by St. Mary's, he used his position as a priest to groom and to sexually abuse plaintiff Scott Yerger.

17. To the extent that St. Mary's was a different entity, corporation, or organization during the period of time during which Father Fingerle used his position as a priest to sexually abuse Scott, such entity, corporation, or organization is hereby on notice that it is intended to be a defendant in this lawsuit.

18. To the extent St. Mary's is a successor to a different entity, corporation, or organization which existed during the period of time during which Father Fingerle used his position as a priest to sexually abuse Scott, such predecessor entity, corporation, or organization is hereby on notice that it is intended to be a defendant in this lawsuit.

19. All such St. Mary's-related entities, corporations, or organizations are collectively referred to herein as "St. Mary's."

IV. VENUE

20. Venue is proper because the Diocese is a domestic corporation authorized to transact business in New York with its principal office located in Erie County.

21. Venue is proper because St. Mary's has its principal office located in Hamburg, New York.

22. Venue is proper because Erie is the county in which a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to plaintiff's claim occurred.

23. Venue is proper because plaintiff Scott Yerger currently resides in Tonawanda, NY.

V. STATEMENT OF FACTS AS TO PLAINTIFF SCOTT YERGER

24. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese was the owner of St. Mary's and held itself out to the public as the owner of St. Mary's.

25. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese, its agents, servants, and employees managed, maintained, operated, and controlled St. Mary's.

26. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese employed priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or others who served Catholic families at St. Mary's, including plaintiff Scott Yerger and his family.

27. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese, its agents, servants, and employees managed, maintained, operated, and controlled St. Mary's, and held out to the public its agents, servants, and employees as those who managed, maintained, operated, and controlled St. Mary's.

28. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese was responsible for the hiring and staffing, and did the hiring and staffing, at St. Mary's.

29. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese was responsible for and did the recruitment and staffing of volunteers at St. Mary's.

30. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times the Diocese materially benefited from the operation of St. Mary's, including the services of Father Fingerle and the services of those who managed and supervised Father Fingerle.

31. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's owned a parish, church, and school.

32. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's held itself out to the public as the owner of St. Mary's.

33. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's employed priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or others who served Catholic families, including plaintiff Scott Yerger and his family.

34. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's, its agents, servants, and employees managed, maintained, operated, and controlled St. Mary's, and held out to the

public its agents, servants and employees as those who managed, maintained, operated, and controlled St. Mary's.

35. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's was responsible for and did the staffing and hiring at St. Mary's.

36. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's was responsible for and did the recruitment and staffing of volunteers at St. Mary's.

37. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times St. Mary's materially benefitted from the operation of St. Mary's, including the services of Father Fingerle and the services of those who managed and supervised Father Fingerle.

38. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was a priest of the Diocese.

39. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was on the staff of, acted as an agent of, and served as an employee of the Diocese.

40. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was acting in the course and scope of his employment with the Diocese.

41. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was employed by the Diocese and assigned to St. Mary's.

42. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was a priest of St. Mary's.

43. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was on the staff of, was an agent of, and served as an employee of St. Mary's.

44. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle was acting in the course and scope of his employment with St. Mary's.

45. Upon information and belief, at all relevant times Father Fingerle had an office on the premises of St. Mary's.

46. When plaintiff Scott Yerger was a minor, he and his parents were members of the Diocese and St. Mary's, and Scott was a student, parishioner, and altar boy.

47. At all relevant times, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, held Father Fingerle out to the public, to Scott, and to his parents, as their agent and employee.

48. At all relevant times, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, held Father Fingerle out to the public, to Scott, and to his parents, as having been vetted, screened, and approved by those defendants.

49. At all relevant times, Scott Yerger and his parents reasonably relied upon the acts and representations of the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, and reasonably believed that Father Fingerle was an agent or employee of those defendants who was vetted, screened, and approved by those defendants.

50. At all relevant times, Scott Yerger and his parents trusted Father Fingerle because the Diocese and St. Mary's held him out as someone who was safe and could be trusted with the supervision, care, custody, and control of Scott Yerger.

51. At all relevant times, Scott Yerger and his parents believed that the Diocese and St. Mary's would exercise such care as would a parent of ordinary prudence in comparable circumstances when those defendants assumed supervision, care, custody, and control of Scott.

52. When Scott was a minor, Father Fingerle sexually abused him.

53. Scott was sexually abused by Father Fingerle from approximately age 10 to 13 years old.

54. Based on the representations of the Diocese and St. Mary's that Father Fingerle was safe and trustworthy, Scott and his parents allowed Scott to be under the supervision of, and in the care, custody, and control of, the Diocese and St. Mary's, including during the times when Scott was sexually abused by Father Fingerle.

55. Based on the representations of the Diocese and St. Mary's that Father Fingerle was safe and trustworthy, Scott and his parents allowed Scott to be under the supervision of, and in the care, custody, and control of, Father Fingerle, including during the times when Scott was sexually abused by Father Fingerle.

56. Neither Scott nor his parents would have allowed him to be under the supervision of, or in the care, custody, or control of, the Diocese, St. Mary's, or Father Fingerle if the Diocese or St. Mary's had disclosed to Scott or his parents that Father Fingerle was not safe and was not trustworthy, and that he in fact posed a danger to Scott in that Father Fingerle was likely to sexually abuse Scott.

57. No parent of ordinary prudence in comparable circumstances would have allowed Scott to be under the supervision of, or in the care, custody, or control of, the Diocese, St. Mary's, or Father Fingerle if the Diocese or St. Mary's had disclosed to Scott or his parents that Father Fingerle was not safe and was not trustworthy, and that he in fact posed a danger to Scott in that Father Fingerle was likely to sexually abuse him.

58. From on or about 1981 through on or about 1984, Father Fingerle exploited the trust and authority vested in him by defendants by grooming Scott to gain his trust and to obtain control over him as part of Father Fingerle's plan to sexually molest and abuse Scott and other children.

59. Father Fingerle used his position of trust and authority as a priest of the Diocese and of St. Mary's to groom Scott and to sexually abuse him multiple times, including when Scott was under the supervision of, and in the care, custody, or control of, the Diocese, St. Mary's, and Father Fingerle.

60. At certain times, the sexual abuse of Scott by Father Fingerle occurred at St. Mary's, including inside the church.

61. At certain times, Father Fingerle's sexual abuse of Scott occurred during activities that were sponsored by, or were a direct result of activities sponsored by, the Diocese and St. Mary's, including during altar boy services.

62. Upon information and belief, prior to the times mentioned herein, Father Fingerle was a known sexual abuser of children.

63. At all relevant times, defendants, their agents, servants, and employees, knew or should have known that Father Fingerle was a known sexual abuser of children.

64. At all relevant times, it was reasonably foreseeable to defendants, their agents, servants, and employees that Father Fingerle's sexual abuse of children would likely result in injury to others, including the sexual abuse of Scott and other children by Father Fingerle.

65. Upon information and belief, at certain times between 1981 and 1984, defendants, their agents, servants, and employees knew or should have known that Father Fingerle was sexually abusing Scott and other children at St. Mary's and elsewhere.

66. Upon information and belief, defendants, their agents, servants, and employees knew or should have known that the sexual abuse by Father Fingerle of Scott was ongoing.

67. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, knew or should have known before and during Father Fingerle's sexual abuse of Scott

that priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or other persons serving the Diocese and St. Mary's had used their positions with those defendants to groom and to sexually abuse children.

68. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, knew or should have known before and during Father Fingerle's sexual abuse of Scott that such priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or other persons could not be "cured" through treatment or counseling.

69. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, concealed the sexual abuse of children by Father Fingerle in order to conceal their own bad acts in failing to protect children from him, to protect their reputation, and to prevent victims of such sexual abuse by him from coming forward during the extremely limited statute of limitations prior to the enactment of the CVA, despite knowing that Father Fingerle would continue to molest children.

70. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, consciously and recklessly disregarded their knowledge that Father Fingerle would use his position with the defendants to sexually abuse children, including Scott.

71. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, disregarded their knowledge that Father Fingerle would use his position with them to sexually abuse children, including Scott.

72. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, acted in concert with each other or with Father Fingerle to conceal the danger that Father Fingerle posed to children, including Scott, so that Father Fingerle could continue serving them despite their knowledge of that danger.

73. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, knew that their negligent, reckless, and outrageous conduct would inflict severe emotional and psychological distress, as well as personal physical injury, on others, including Scott, and he did in fact suffer severe emotional and psychological distress and personal physical injury as a result of their wrongful conduct.

74. Upon information and belief, the Diocese and St. Mary's, their agents, servants, and employees, concealed the sexual abuse of children by priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or others in order to conceal their own bad acts in failing to protect children from being abused, to protect their reputation, and to prevent victims of such sexual abuse from coming forward during the extremely limited statute of limitations prior to the enactment of the CVA, despite knowing that those priests, school administrators, teachers, religious sisters, and/or other persons would continue to molest children.

75. By reason of the wrongful acts of the Diocese and St. Mary's as detailed herein, Scott sustained physical and psychological injuries, including but not limited to, severe emotional and psychological distress, humiliation, fright, dissociation, anger, depression, anxiety, family turmoil and loss of faith, a severe shock to his nervous system, physical pain and mental anguish, and emotional and psychological damage, and, upon information and belief, some or all of these injuries are of a permanent and lasting nature, and Scott has and/or will become obligated to expend sums of money for treatment.

VI. CAUSES OF ACTION AS TO PLAINTIFF SCOTT YERGER

A. FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION – NEGLIGENCE

76. Plaintiff Scott Yerger repeats and re-alleges all of his allegations above and below.

77. The Diocese and St. Mary's had a duty to take reasonable steps to protect plaintiff Scott Yerger, a child, from foreseeable harm when he was under their supervision and in their care, custody, and control.

78. The Diocese and St. Mary's also had a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent Father Fingerle from using the tasks, premises, and instrumentalities of his position with the defendants to target, groom, and sexually abuse children, including Scott.

79. The Diocese and St. Mary's were supervising Scott, and had care, custody, and control of Scott, when he was a student, parishioner, altar boy and at other times, during which time those defendants had a duty to take reasonable steps to protect him.

80. These circumstances created a special relationship between the Diocese and Scott, and between St. Mary's and Scott, which imposed on each of those defendants a duty to exercise the degree of care of a parent of ordinary prudence in comparable circumstances.

81. The Diocese and St. Mary's breached each of the foregoing duties by failing to exercise reasonable care to prevent Father Fingerle from harming Scott, including sexually abusing him.

82. In breaching their duties, including hiring, retaining, and failing to supervise Father Fingerle, giving him access to children, entrusting their tasks, premises, and instrumentalities to him, failing to train their personnel in the signs of sexual predation and to protect children from sexual abuse and other harm, failing to warn Scott, his parents, and other parents of the danger of sexual abuse, and failing to create a safe and secure environment for Scott and other children who were under their supervision and in their care, custody, and control, the Diocese and St. Mary's created a risk that Scott would be sexually abused by Father Fingerle. The Diocese and St. Mary's

through their actions and inactions created an environment that placed Scott in danger of unreasonable risks of harm under the circumstances.

83. In breaching their duties, including hiring, retaining, and failing to supervise Father Fingerle, giving him access to children, entrusting their tasks, premises, and instrumentalities to him, failing to train their personnel in the signs of sexual predation and to protect children from sexual abuse and other harm, failing to warn Scott, his parents, and other parents of the danger of sexual abuse, and failing to create a safe and secure environment for Scott and other children who were under their supervision and in their care, custody, and control, the Diocese and St. Mary's acted willfully and with conscious disregard for the need to protect Scott. The Diocese and St. Mary's through their actions and inactions created an environment that placed Scott in danger of unreasonable risks of harm under the circumstances.

84. It was reasonably foreseeable that defendants' breach of these duties of care would result in the sexual abuse of Scott.

85. As a direct and proximate result of the acts and omissions of the Diocese and St. Mary's, Father Fingerle groomed and sexually abused Scott, which has caused Scott to suffer general and special damages as more fully described herein.

B. SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION – OUTRAGE AND INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

86. Plaintiff Scott Yerger repeats and re-alleges all of his allegations above and below.

87. The Diocese and St. Mary's engaged in reckless, extreme, and outrageous conduct by providing Father Fingerle with access to children, including plaintiff Scott Yerger, despite knowing that he would likely use his position to groom and to sexually abuse them, including Scott. Their misconduct was so shocking and outrageous that it exceeds the reasonable bounds of

decency as measured by what the average member of the community would tolerate and demonstrates an utter disregard by them of the consequences that would follow.

88. As a result of this reckless, extreme, and outrageous conduct, Father Fingerle gained access to Scott and sexually abused him.

89. The Diocese and St. Mary's knew that this reckless, extreme, and outrageous conduct would inflict severe emotional and psychological distress, including personal physical injury, on others, and Scott did in fact suffer severe emotional and psychological distress and personal physical injury as a result, including severe mental anguish, humiliation and emotional and physical distress.

VII. CPLR 1603 – NO APPORTIONMENT OF LIABILITY

90. Pursuant to CPLR 1603, the foregoing causes of action are exempt from the operation of CPLR 1601 by reason of one or more of the exemptions provided in CPLR 1602, including but not limited to, CPLR 1602(2), CPLR 1602(5), 1602(7) and 1602(11), thus precluding defendants from limiting their liability by apportioning some portion of liability to any joint tortfeasor.

VIII. PRAYER FOR RELIEF


91. Plaintiff Scott Yerger demands judgment against the defendants named in his causes of action, together with compensatory and punitive damages to be determined at trial, and the interest, cost and disbursements pursuant to his causes of action, and such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

92. Plaintiff Scott Yerger specifically reserves the right to pursue additional causes of action, other than those outlined above, that are supported by the facts pleaded or that may be supported by other facts learned in discovery.

Dated: November 6, 2019

Respectfully Yours,

MARSH LAW FIRM PLLC

By 
James R. Marsh
151 East Post Road, Suite 102
White Plains, NY 10601-5210
Phone: 929-232-3235
jamesmarsh@marsh.law

Jennifer Freeman
151 East Post Road, Suite 102
White Plains, NY 10601-5210
Phone: 929-232-3128
jenniferfreeman@marsh.law

Robert Y. Lewis
151 East Post Road, Suite 102
White Plains, NY 10601-5210
Phone: 646-306-2145
robertlewis@marsh.law

PFAU COCHRAN VERTETIS AMALA PLLC

By 
Michael T. Pfau
403 Columbia St.
Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206-462-4335
michael@pcvalaw.com
Pro hac vice forthcoming

Jason P. Amala
403 Columbia St.
Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206-462-4339
jason@pcvalaw.com
Pro hac vice forthcoming

Anelga Doumanian
31 Hudson Yards
11th Floor Suite 36
New York, NY 10001
Phone: 206-330-0215
adoumanian@pcvalaw.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff