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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A civil suit was filed in Vancouver today against the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver and one of its priests, Fr. Damian Cooper.

The plaintiff, Kathleen Taylor, alleges she met the priest at a Catholic camp when she was 15 years old and that a sexually abusive relationship began the following year during counselling appointments at Holy Rosary Cathedral. The Notice of Civil Claim describes abuse which continued in secret for years, a period of time during which Fr. Cooper served at Holy Rosary Cathedral and other parishes in Vancouver, Aldergrove and Squamish.

Taylor claims that after she disclosed the abuse to the Church in 1994, she was told by Archbishop Exner that Cooper would be sent to a treatment center in the USA. Fr. Cooper later served as a priest at St. Brigid's Parish in Rockville Center, Long Island.

In 2002, the Catholic clergy abuse scandal in Boston revealed a common practice of shuffling abusive clergy to parishes where their histories as sexual abusers would not be known. Shortly afterwards, the Rockville Center diocese faced a Grand Jury investigation for sheltering abusers, and Fr. Cooper left Rockville Centre abruptly.

Taylor next became aware of Fr. Cooper's whereabouts in 2005 when he was listed as a spiritual director at the Fraser Valley Pregnancy Centre. This news was the turning point for Taylor: "After seeing how Fr. Cooper had been shuffled around, and realizing that the Archdiocese was putting more vulnerable teenage girls at risk even while touting its new abuse policies, I began to think seriously about coming forward to share my story with the public."

Taylor believes that the public image the Church chooses to present can distort the reality of clergy abuse. "Just this week, I saw Fr. Cooper's name in a list of past vocation directors on the Archdiocese's website, where he was lauded as one of the "great men" of the Archdiocese. I couldn't believe they were portraying him in that way, considering what they know about his history."

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Taylor hopes that her painful decision to come forward will encourage other survivors of clergy abuse to do the same. "Catholics deserve to know the reality of this organization which expects to be entrusted with their obedience, their money, and their children's education. But the truth will remain hidden unless survivors speak up."

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