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MEDIA CONTACT:

Karolyn Raphael, Winger Marketing

312-494-0422

karolyn@wingermarketing.com

Romanucci & Blandin, LLC File Civil Lawsuit on Behalf of Sexual Abuse Victims Against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet

CHICAGO – (Sept. 18, 2014) Attorneys for five plaintiffs and Illinois citizens, John Doe A, B, and C, and their parents, Parent Doe A and Parent Doe B, today announced the filing of a civil lawsuit against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet, alleging sexual abuse committed by Father Leonardo Mateo of the diocese in the early 1980s when the plaintiffs, all male, were minors. The claim contains more than 20 counts against the diocese including negligence, willful and wanton conduct, intentional infliction of emotional distress, civil conspiracy, and fraud. Throughout the period of alleged sexual abuse, the complaint asserts that Father Leonardo Mateo, now deceased, was an ordained Roman Catholic priest and parish pastor at the Immaculate Conception Parish in Elmhurst, Illinois and under the direct supervision and control of the Diocese of Joliet and its clergy and supervisors.

The complaint states that in 1980 or 1981 Father Mateo became friends with the family of siblings John Doe B and C, when they were parishioners at Immaculate Conception Parish in Elmhurst where Father Mateo led church services. At the time, John Doe B and C were eight or nine, and six or seven, respectively.

Gaining the trust of the family and the permission of the parents of John Doe B and C, Father Mateo regularly socialized with the siblings outside of church services, including trips to the local YMCA swimming pool. John Doe A, who was not a church parishioner but a friend of John Doe B, first met Father Mateo at the YMCA during this time. During a six-month period beginning in 1980 or 1981, Father Mateo began sexually abusing John Doe A at regular outings to the YMCA and also at Father Mateo's apartment. The abuse consisted of fondling, groping, and sodomy with his finger. Father Mateo also fondled and groped John Doe B and C at trips to the YMCA and Mateo's apartment.

Upon learning of the sexual molestation of his sons, the father of John Doe B and C contacted the local police and demanded that the Diocese of Joliet remove Father Mateo from the parish. Around 1982, Father Mateo was eventually removed to another parish in Glen Ellyn, Illinois and within the Diocese of Joliet, where his predatory and sexual abuse of children continued there and at other parishes for years, until his return to the Philippines, his native country.

“Unfortunately, this lawsuit filed on behalf of our clients is just another instance of criminal sexual conduct and abuse committed by trusted members of the religious community, that has sadly become a familiar and well-known characteristic of the Catholic church,” said lead attorney for the plaintiffs, Antonio Romanucci, partner at Romanucci & Blandin, LLC. “In this particular case, the Diocese of Joliet knew about and documented the sexual predatory behavior of Father Mateo, but over a period of several years, chose to publicly hide the substantiated pattern of sexual abuse of its clergy at the physical, emotional and psychological expense of children they should have protected.”

As of 2013 and per the diocese’s website at the time, Father Mateo had at least one substantiated allegation of sexual abuse. Other allegations within the claim include:

- As early as the 1950s, the Diocese of Joliet, as part of the Roman Catholic Church, engaged in a conspiracy to intentionally conceal criminal sexual conduct of their agents as evidenced by a written Instruction titled, “On the Manner of Proceeding in Causes involving Crime of Solicitation,” which was purposely labeled confidential among clergy leadership and contained instructions on how to manage cases or accusations against clergy who engaged in sexual conduct with minors.
- The Church, including the Diocese of Joliet, intentionally and fraudulently maintained secret archival files of sexual misconduct by clergy with the purpose of protecting predatory clergy from criminal prosecution, to maintain charitable contributions, and to avoid public scandal and negative attention.
- During his tenure as Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet from 1979 to 2006, Joseph L. Imesch assigned at least 26 well-known and some criminally charged pedophile priests at various parishes within the diocese. He also never reported these priests to law authorities and purposely transferred many of these priests within parishes of the diocese, not notifying parishioners for the reason of these transfers.

The plaintiffs seek a judgment against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet, awarding a minimum of \$50,000 in compensatory damages and attorney’s fees. The lawsuit is civil action No: 2014L009758.

About Romanucci & Blandin, LLC

Romanucci & Blandin has been rated as a leading civil trial practice law firm in Chicago centering in personal injury and police misconduct. The attorneys at the Chicago law firm represent individuals and their families in catastrophic personal injury matters, wrongful death and workers’ compensation cases. The cases that are referred to Romanucci & Blandin involve accidents or injuries which occurred due to negligence and carelessness on the part of individuals, governmental bodies and corporations of all sizes. Since its inception more than 15 years ago, Romanucci & Blandin has secured more than \$300 million in verdicts and settlements on behalf of their clients. For more information about Romanucci & Blandin, please visit www.rblaw.net or call (312) 458-1000.

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