

[https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local\\_news/former-priest-accused-of-sex-crimes-heads-to-trial/article\\_co4cffa6-416f-11ea-8080-a3f4219d5e6c.html](https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/former-priest-accused-of-sex-crimes-heads-to-trial/article_co4cffa6-416f-11ea-8080-a3f4219d5e6c.html)

## Former priest accused of sex crimes heads to trial

By Phaedra Haywood [phaywood@sfnewmexican.com](mailto:phaywood@sfnewmexican.com)

Jan 28, 2020



Marvin Archuleta sits in District Judge Matthew J. Wilson's courtroom Feb. 15.

Luis Sánchez Saturno

New Mexican file photo

Jury selection is set to begin Wednesday in the trial of an ex-priest accused of raping a first grader at a parochial school in Santa Fe County in the late 1980s.

Marvin Archuleta's criminal trial is the first to come out of state Attorney General Hector Balderas' ongoing investigation into claims of child sex abuse in Roman Catholic churches throughout New Mexico.

The state intends to bring Thomas P. Doyle of Virginia, a national expert on clergy sex abuse, to testify in the case, according to a witness list.

Doyle — an attorney, victim’s advocate, columnist for the *National Catholic Reporter* and a former priest — is credited with being one of the first people within the church to speak out on child sexual abuse by the clergy.

The Attorney General’s Office charged Archuleta, 82, with criminal sexual penetration of a child under 13 and kidnapping in February 2018 after his accuser in the case — now an adult — told a special agent that Archuleta tied him up with a belt and raped him when he was 6 years old.

The man said that during the 1986-87 school year, Archuleta called him out of class at Holy Cross Catholic School in Santa Cruz and took him to an area where priests went to change clothes, according an affidavit for an arrest warrant.

He said Archuleta forced him to kneel on a chair with his forearms resting on a table, then pulled down his pants.

When Archuleta took off his belt, the man said, he thought he was going to get a spanking. But instead Archuleta wrapped the belt around his chest so he couldn’t move, poured water down his back to “help with the pain” and proceeded to rape him, saying, “This is God’s love. This is how we show God’s love.”

The man said he didn’t tell anyone for a long time about the alleged rape. He later became addicted to alcohol and other substances, according to the affidavit.

According to a criminal complaint, Archuleta was ordained in 1970 and served as a priest in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe from 1970-78 and from 1987-94.

After agents served a search warrant on the archdiocese, investigators found a file containing other sexual assault allegations against Archuleta. He has been accused of sexual abuse in several lawsuits against the archdiocese. Most were settled out of court, and two are still pending.

Celine Baca Radigan, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese, did not respond to messages seeking comment Tuesday but told *The New Mexican* in March that church officials first received a report accusing Archuleta of abuse in 1994 and immediately removed him from the ministry and “restricted his priestly faculties.”

He was never reassigned within the archdiocese, she said.

Following his dismissal, Archuleta was sent to Maryland for an evaluation and then to the Vianney Renewal Center near St. Louis, which offered rehabilitation and reconciliation for priests and was a stopping point for clergy accused of abuse.

The facility is operated by the Catholic organization Servants of the Paraclete, which ran a similar rehabilitation facility in Jemez Springs.

Santa Fe attorney Merit Bennett — who has represented four of Archuleta’s accusers in civil court — said Archuleta’s criminal case represents a turning point in how the criminal justice system approaches clergy sex abuse claims.

“In a die-hard Catholic state, this is historical for the attorney general to take this on,” Bennett said, adding that in the 1990s and as recently as the early 2000s, he was unable to get a district attorney to press charges in any of his client’s cases, even when presented with strong evidence.

“They were elected officials, and they wouldn’t touch the church,” Bennett said. “Thankfully, that much has shifted. But it’s taken so long.”

A spokesman for Balderas’ office said in an email Tuesday: “Our office has focused on combating powerful institutions who abuse New Mexicans, from corporations, to government entities, and in the context of this case the Catholic Church. We are of course respectful of the beliefs of all New Mexicans, but we must do everything in our power to protect the rights of victims and survivors, irrespective of who is involved in the crimes.”

Ryan Villa, Archuleta’s defense attorney, said in a phone interview Tuesday: “I don’t think this case is about taking on the Catholic Church. It’s just about whether Marvin Archuleta did what he’s accused of ... and I don’t think he did.”

Villa said he intends to present evidence that Archuleta was in Silver Spring, Md., at the time of the alleged crime.

“There are records and newspaper articles we anticipate the jury is going to see that proves that,” Villa said.

Villa said he also intends to introduce testimony from the accuser's first grade teacher, whom he says prosecutors never interviewed.

"She has testified she has no recollection of this incident at all," Villa said. "No recollection of Marvin Archuleta, [which] essentially contradicts the alleged victim's statement about what happened."

Archuleta's trial is expected to last through Feb. 7. If convicted on both charges, he faces up to 36 years in prison.

**Phaedra Haywood**

Courts Reporter