**COPTIC CHURCH SEX ABUSE: DEPOSITIONS UNDERWAY IN**

**RAPE CASE AGAINST CALIFORNIA PRIEST**

***Attorney: “Epidemic of Abuse” Within the Church; As First Sex Assault Case Against Father Baky Proceeds, Second Survivor – a Minor When Assault Occurred – Plans to File New Lawsuit in Coming Months.***

**SAN FRANCISCO – DECEMBER 7, 2023 –** Depositions are underway in the case against a San Francisco-based Coptic priest accused of repeatedly sexually assaulting a parishioner. The survivor’s attorney says the case against Father Antonios Moheb Baky, which was originally filed in August of 2021, is just one example of the rampant sexual abuse permitted within the Church community. Following a lengthy discovery process, depositions are taking place in December and into 2024. A jury trial is scheduled for August 2024.

The lawsuit was filed against Father Baky, an ordained Hegumen priest with the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of Northern California and

the Western United States of America, and the St. Mary & St. John Coptic Orthodox Church in California, [in California Superior Court in Alameda County](https://sexualassaultvictimadvocates.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Awadalla-v-Baky-Complaint-filed-081621.pdf) by attorney Brian Perkins of the law firm Peiffer Wolf Carr Kane Conway & Wise (“Peiffer Wolf”).

[Father Baky’s deposition](https://sexualassaultvictimadvocates.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NOD-Amended-Baky-for-Dec-20-and-Dec-21-1.pdf) – sworn testimony to later be used in court – is scheduled to proceed on December 20 and December 21, 2023.

Brian Perkins, partner at Peiffer Wolf, said: **“We’ve uncovered an epidemic of sexual abuse by Father Baky in the Coptic Church, and the culture of intimidating and silencing survivors goes all the way up to Pope Tawadros II in Egypt, who happens to be Father Baky’s cousin. Next month, Peiffer Wolf will be filing a lawsuit on behalf of a second survivor of sexual assault by Father Baky. Our hope is that by sharing these stories publicly, it will empower additional survivors of Father Baky to come forward to get the justice they deserve.”**

Samah Sabri Awadalla, the first survivor of Father Baky to speak publicly, said: **“It’s really hard to talk about the assault, even years later. The fact that I was attacked by my own priest, a man I trusted who used my faith to prey on me, is a trauma that pains me deep in my soul. I finally came forward when I learned that there are other survivors in the congregation just like me. If other survivors of Father Baky are reading this, know that you are not alone.”**

Sally Zakhari, founder of Coptic Survivor, said: **“It’s sickening to think about what Samah has been through at the hands of Father Baky and the Church itself, which baselessly attacked her to defend a vicious sexual predator. I know because I survived through a similar horror story. That’s why I founded Coptic Survivor – to support survivors, raise awareness, and hold abusers accountable. I’m heartbroken for Samah, but I’m grateful that we are exposing and shining a light on a very dark side of the Coptic Church (Ephesians 5:11). The Church should be a safe space where Copts can connect with God. That’s why it’s imperative to remove the ravenous wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15) like Father Baky who** **have infiltrated and corrupted the church from the inside out.”**

Melanie Sakoda, Survivor Support Director for [SNAP](https://www.snapnetwork.org/) (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests), added: **“All sexual abuse causes tremendous trauma, but when a clergy member is the abuser, we’re talking about a whole different level of damage. Abuse by clergy also has a spiritual dimension – directly impacting a survivor’s relationship with God – that is not found in other cases. SNAP offers help and support to survivors. We’re here to listen and to assist in any way that we can, including in your fight for justice. Don’t suffer alone and in silence: there is strength in numbers, and you are not alone!”**

According to the lawsuit, there is a group of priests in the Coptic Orthodox Church who for years have been permitted to sexually assault, sexually abuse, and sexually harass their own church members with impunity. Historically, the Church has gone to great lengths to prevent reports of sexual misconduct from becoming public. This desire to suppress reports of this deplorable behavior stems from fears among Church leaders that any negative reports would harm the Coptic community and the reputation of the priesthood. Consequently, leaders in the Church have worked hard to maintain a culture of silence among survivors and witnesses of sexual misconduct. Church leaders are experienced at executing strategies which pressure survivors and witnesses of sexual misconduct to remain silent.

For decades prior to Father Baky’s attacks on Samah, the Church was fully aware that other members had been sexually assaulted by their clergy, including Father Baky, and had received numerous complaints about sexual misconduct by members of its clergy.

Samah first met Father Baky in 2015 when she moved to the United States with her husband and family. Samah volunteered for the Church and eventually worked directly for the priest. Samah developed a close relationship with Father Baky founded on trust, respect, and obedience to him. The clergyman fostered this relationship by providing Samah with personal and spiritual guidance. Samah considered Father Baky to be a strong religious leader and father figure to her. But unbeknownst to Samah, the priest was grooming her to sexually assault and abuse her.

Samah was attacked by Father Baky three separate times beginning in 2017 into 2018. Two of the attacks took place at the St. Mary & St. John Church property in Pleasanton. The most serious attack occurred at Father Baky’s home after Samah brought a meal to him. During this attack, Father Baky violently raped her.

Samah was afraid to report these assaults after they happened. Eventually, after Samah learned that Father Baky had sexually assaulted others, she came forward with reports of her own attacks. The attacks were reported to the Coptic Church in July 2020 and to the Dublin Police Department and Pleasanton Police Department in August 2020. As expected, after the reports were made, Coptic Church leaders used various forms of persuasion, influence, intimidation, defamatory statements, and even threats in an attempt to silence Samah and to cover up the priest’s assaults.

The Coptic Church formed a sham committee to review the allegations against Father

Baky. But the investigative committee members included the clergyman’s friends and subordinates. Father Baky was in a supervisory position over members of the “investigation” into the allegations against him. Unsurprisingly, the committee failed to conduct a proper investigation and H.H. Pope Tawadros II, the cleric’s cousin, blessed the proceedings and improperly determined the allegations were unfounded.

In January, a second survivor of Father Baky, also represented by Peiffer Wolf, is expected to anonymously file a lawsuit. The survivor was 17 years old at the time of the alleged assault that took place during the sacrament of confession.

Perkins added: **“We are committed to justice, and we will not stop until we get it. We know that these cases are just the tip of the iceberg. We hope that these cases will result in the removal of predator priests like Father Baky from the clergy to protect members of the Church community from future attacks.**

The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Churches in the world and has over 20 million followers worldwide. U.S. population centers include New York, New Jersey, California, Florida, Tennessee, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas. There are over 250 Coptic churches across the United States serving the growing Coptic population.

Anyone with information related to Father Baky, the Coptic Church, and the ongoing investigations is asked to reach out to Peiffer Wolf.

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**Peiffer Wolf Carr Kane Conway & Wise** is a national law firm with offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, Cleveland, Youngstown, and St. Louis. Visit [www.sexualassaultvictimadvocates.com/](http://www.sexualassaultvictimadvocates.com/) for more information.

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