



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of **JACKSON**
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Diocese Statement on Mississippi Supreme Court's June 16, 2022, Dismissal of De Lange's Lawsuit

On Oct. 2, 2019, Arie Matheus (Aad) de Lange filed a lawsuit against the Catholic Diocese of Jackson and Bishop Joseph Kopacz. The Diocese and Bishop Kopacz are pleased to confirm that on June 16, 2022, the Mississippi Supreme dismissed de Lange's lawsuit and awarded the Diocese and Bishop Kopacz their costs of appeal.

In his pleadings de Lange levied many baseless claims against the Diocese and Bishop Kopacz relating to his employment. At trial, the Diocese and Bishop Kopacz were prepared to respond to the pleadings filed by de Lange and prove that during his tenure the Diocese suffered from:

- (1) A weakened financial and administrative condition;
- (2) Internal accounting deficiencies as identified by third party financial audits of the Diocese;
- (3) A large unexpected \$900,000 financial deficit for fiscal year 2018-19; and
- (4) A lack of leadership communication and collaboration between the Office of Finance and Administration (De Lange's department) and diocesan leadership including but not limited to the Bishop and the Diocesan Finance Council.

The Diocese and Bishop Kopacz filed a motion to dismiss de Lange's lawsuit based upon the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The motion sought dismissal because de Lange was asking the courts of Mississippi to interpret the application of Canon law (church law) to the facts surrounding de Lange's termination of employment. The Mississippi Supreme Court granted the motion and dismissed the lawsuit on the grounds that the First Amendment deprives civil courts of jurisdiction over claims which would require excessive entanglement in church employment decisions finding that "the Diocese's decision to terminate de Lange pursuant to [church law] is binding on the civil court, and this Court must accept that decision."

The Diocese and Bishop Kopacz are grateful that the Supreme Court recognized the serious constitutional concerns raised by de Lange's lawsuit and his challenge to the Diocese's decision to terminate his employment. Bishop Kopacz made the following statement: "We rejoice in the unanimous decision by the Supreme Court of Mississippi. We pray that the Court is ever mindful of the constitutional religious rights of religious institutions. We thank the Court for its decision and its guidance."

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