

Deacon asserts Apuron's innocence, Toves to continue inquiry

'Claims of molestation will not be investigated'

By Jasmine Stole
jasmine@mvguam.com
Variety News Staff

DEACON Larry Claros, the recently appointed sexual abuse response coordinator for the Archdiocese of Agaña, said he believes Archbishop Anthony Apuron is innocent.

Recently, former Guam resident and ex-seminarian John Toves said he had knowledge that the archbishop allegedly molested a male relative about 30 years ago. Claros and Toves met briefly yesterday morning at the Chancery office in Hagåtña.

Toves said he wanted to meet with Apuron personally while he is on Guam but Apuron's spokesman, Rev. Adrian Cristobal, said the archbishop was "fully booked" yesterday when Toves arrived at the Chancery office. Instead, Toves met with Claros.

After the short meeting, Claros said the meeting with Toves went well. The deacon said a review board met and determined not to investigate the claims made in Toves' letter.

"There is no investigation. These are just allegations brought forth by Mr. Toves," Claros said. "The review board has met to go ahead and look at these allegations and see if there is anything we need to investigate, and there's none."

The victim should make the molestation accusations, Claros said, not another person.

"I think if anyone is to go ahead and give allegations, that the responsible person needs to surface and make those accusations (him) or herself versus a third party," the deacon said.

Accusations against Apuron should have been brought to the "proper authorities" like the police, Claros said.

Policy

The archdiocese's policy on sexual abuse calls for the victim to make a complaint, and that is what the review board is looking

for, Claros said. "The committee is looking more as 'where's the victim?' because of our policy that it is the welfare of the victim that needs to be attended first and foremost," he said.

The archdiocese's sexual abuse policy advises that the proper response to allegations of sexual misconduct is to report the suspected sexual misconduct to the archbishop and to civil authorities.

Next, the archbishop is to verify that any report required by law is made. The archbishop is then supposed to notify the sexual abuse response coordinator, direct an archdiocesan investigator to do a complete investigation and direct the accused person not to have contact with the complainant.

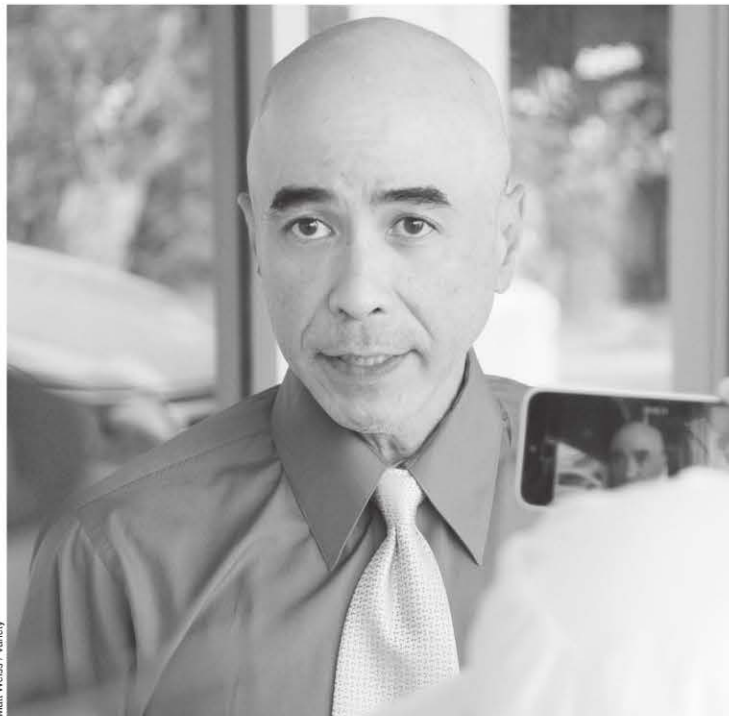
Yesterday afternoon, Cristobal issued a statement on behalf of the archdiocese acknowledging receipt of Toves' "concern" and stating that the policy on sexual abuse was being adhered to. "Pursuant to this policy and to clarify the issue, the matter is currently under review," the statement said.

The archdiocese's policy defines a complainant as a person who alleges that sexual misconduct has occurred.

"As far as I know this is the first I've heard of any allegations and it's a very sad state right now that the leader in our community is going to go through this scrutiny. However, I do believe and I'm very confident that truth will prevail," Claros said.

Toves said Claros' and Apuron's actions are not in alignment with the church's sexual misconduct policy. "You know it's all the smoke-and-mirrors game and it's all the placate-and-hope-they-go-away game," Toves said. "To me it does not look like it's seriously being investigated. In (Deacon Claros') own words, it's not being investigated."

Toves said he will try every



Former Guam resident and ex-seminarian John Toves talks to the media yesterday outside the Chancery office in Hagåtña. Toves said he wanted to meet with Archbishop Anthony Apuron personally while he is on Guam but Apuron's spokesman said the archbishop was "fully booked" yesterday when Toves arrived at the Chancery office.

day during the rest of his stay to meet directly with Apuron.

Recalled

In the 1980s, while he and his relative were in high school attending Tai Seminary, Toves said he recalled Apuron picking up and dropping off his relative with some regularity. Later in the 1980s, Toves said he found out his relative was abused by Apuron.

Toves has not spoken to the alleged victim.

Toves said he stands behind his allegations and he's received support from other Catholics. Although his relative, who lives off-island, has yet to stand up and address the accusations made by Toves, Toves said he takes full responsibility for his actions. He also said he has yet to speak to his cousin about going to the archdiocese about the alleged sexual abuse.

Apuron said in a statement released last weekend that he

is filing a defamation suit, but did not indicate who the lawsuit would be directed against.

A lawsuit is something Toves said he is hoping will happen because it would require the archbishop to provide a deposition under oath.

Toves said he's hoping other victims of abuse will reach out to him and he has made himself available. He said he will send the reports directly to the Vatican and will sign a confidentiality statement in case other victims fear retribution from the church.

Toves said victims can email him at johncharlestoves@gmail.com.

Since he's been on Guam, Toves said he's received two "suspicious" emails and he is cautious about his whereabouts. He said he's not foolish enough not to think there might be some reason for concern about his safety.

Yesterday's meeting with Claros was the first response Toves has received from the archdiocese about a Nov. 21 letter he sent alleging Apuron abused his relative.

He said he has met with Rev. Paul Gofigan and was scheduled to meet with Monsignor James Benavente yesterday. Gofigan expressed support, Toves said, of their meeting.

In addition to discussing Apuron's alleged abuse of Toves' cousin, Toves said he hoped to ask Apuron to reinstate Gofigan and Benavente to their positions at the Dededo Catholic parish and the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica, respectively.

"It's about other victims, future victims," Toves said. "Other actions by the archbishop to vindictively punish people for other reasons. He plays the church like it's a game of chess. It's his toy."

Manhunt...

continued from page 1

about a robbery at Days Inn Guam on Ypao Road in Tamuning.

The suspects were described by the alleged victim, the hotel's front desk clerk, as two males, one of whom was wearing a camouflage mask while the other was wearing an orange construction reflecting vest when they allegedly robbed the establishment.

While making a check of the area,

police spotted the victim's vehicle and followed it on Marine Corps Drive. The suspects then turned onto Route 14 by Guam Premier Outlets toward the Archbishop Flores traffic loop.

Gunshots

During the chase, police reportedly heard three gunshots fired in their direction while they were passing the Golden Motel. No one was reported injured.

Balajadia said the suspects then fled into the old Guam Memorial Hospital site entrance at Ypao Point where they abandoned the vehicle and fled on foot. Police

cordoned off the area.

To reduce the potential escape routes for the fleeing suspects, police officers were stationed at strategic locations including at Route 14 and Ypao Road, at Route 14 at the traffic loop and at Gov. Carlos Camacho Road by Guam Memorial Hospital.

Balajadia said that a joint pursuit operation was then conducted by the SWAT and K9 units, the Criminal Justice Strike Force and officers from all four precincts who were all at the location. Balajadia said GPD marine patrol officers in a boat provided assistance in locating the alleged perpetrators

along the cliff line. Also on location were a handful of volunteer officers who helped in the capture of the suspects.

Roads in the vicinity were closed to traffic during the operation and were reopened around 7:30 a.m., according to Balajadia.

During the manhunt, Balajadia said that the criminal justice strike task force and the K9 unit searched a house which is under construction along the cliffline. In the structure, the task force reportedly located Afaisen hiding in a bathroom White reportedly was found on the cliff line.