

APPELLATE DIVISION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, FIRST DEPARTMENT

John Doe JP v. Archdiocese of N.Y.

John Doe JP, 2026 NY Slip Op 00015 (Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York First Department 2026) · No. Index No. 950638/20, 950253/21, 950146/20, 951386/21, 950631/21, 950057/21, 950673/21, 950598/20, 950188/20, 950371/21, 950191/20, 950359/20; Appeal No. 5510; Case No. 2024-07684 · Decided January 6, 2026

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, First Department unanimously affirmed an order requiring the Archdiocese of New York to disclose its Tribunal Laicization File concerning former priest Francis J. Stinner, subject to redactions of Social Security numbers and dates of birth. The court held that the requested records were reasonably calculated to lead to relevant evidence concerning alleged abuse, the Archdiocese's knowledge, and its response, and that the discovery did not implicate canon law or sacramental issues sufficient to raise a First Amendment concern.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, First Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Renwick, P.J.; Manzanet, J.; Gesmer, J.; Higgitt, J.; Michael, J.
JURISDICTION	Appellate Division, First Department, New York
DECIDED	January 6, 2026
DOCKET	Index No. 950638/20, 950253/21, 950146/20, 951386/21, 950631/21, 950057/21, 950673/21, 950598/20, 950188/20, 950371/21, 950191/20, 950359/20; Appeal No. 5510; Case No. 2024-07684
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The Archdiocese appealed from a Supreme Court, New York County order directing it, after in camera review, to disclose its Tribunal Laicization File concerning a former priest, subject to redactions of social security numbers and dates of birth.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Abuse-of-discretion review of Supreme Court's discovery determination.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published New York Appellate Division opinion

PARTIES

The Archdiocese of New York v. John Doe JP et al.

TOPICS

discovery dispute

civil procedure

first amendment

evidence

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

discovery

constitutional law

child sexual abuse litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Supreme Court providently exercised its discretion in directing the Archdiocese to disclose the Tribunal Laicization File after in camera review.
2. Whether production of the file implicated canon law, sacramental issues, or religious doctrine in a manner creating a First Amendment bar to discovery.

HOLDINGS

1. Supreme Court providently exercised its discretion in directing the Archdiocese to produce an unredacted copy of the Tribunal Laicization File, subject to redactions of social security numbers and dates of birth, because the demands were reasonably calculated to lead to relevant and admissible evidence.
2. The First Amendment did not bar discovery because the Archdiocese failed to demonstrate that the requested information implicated canon law or sacramental issues, and the appeal did not contest or address the laicization decision or the religious doctrine underlying it.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Supreme Court providently exercised its discretion in directing the Archdiocese to produce an unredacted copy of the file of the Tribunal proceedings against Stinner.” ([*1])

“Moreover, the Archdiocese did not demonstrate that the information sought implicated canon law or sacramental issues that might give rise to a First Amendment issue.” ([*1])

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs alleged that Francis J. Stinner sexually abused them while serving as a priest in the Archdiocese of New York and that the Archdiocese knew of his conduct yet allowed him to continue in ministry. The Archdiocese later appointed a committee to consider whether Stinner had violated ecclesiastical law and laicized him in 2005. Plaintiffs sought the Tribunal Laicization File as potential evidence concerning the pattern of abuse, the Archdiocese's knowledge, and its response to the danger posed by Stinner.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs in Child Victims Act actions sought discovery of the Archdiocese's Tribunal proceedings file concerning the laicization of former priest Francis J. Stinner. Supreme Court, New York County, directed

production of an unredacted copy of the file subject to limited redactions. The Appellate Division unanimously affirmed without costs.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- *Beals v Roman Catholic Archdiocese of N.Y.*, 242 AD3d 404 (1st Dept 2025)
- *J.L. v Roman Catholic Archdiocese of N.Y.*, 222 AD3d 483, 484 (1st Dept 2023)
- *McNierney v Archdiocese of N.Y.*, 221 AD3d 489, 489 (1st Dept 2023)
- *Matter of Congregation Yetev Lev D'Satmar, Inc. v Kahana*, 9 NY3d 282, 286 (2007)
- *ARK292 Doe v Archdiocese of New York*, 242 AD3d 501, 502 (1st Dept 2025)

OPINION

John Doe JP v. Archdiocese of N.Y. 2026 NY Slip Op 00015

PER CURIAM.

John Doe JP v Archdiocese of N.Y. (2026 NY Slip Op 00015) John Doe JP v Archdiocese of N.Y. 2026 NY Slip Op 00015 Decided on January 06, 2026 Appellate Division, First Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports. Decided and Entered: January 06, 2026 Before: Renwick, P.J., Manzanet, Gesmer, Higgitt, Michael, JJ. Index No. 950638/20, 950253/21, 950146/20, 951386/21, 950631/21, 950057/21, 950673/21, 950598/20, 950188/20, 950371/21, 950191/20, 950359/20|Appeal No. 5510|Case No. 2024-07684| [*1]John Doe JP et al., Respondents, v The Archdiocese of New York, Appellant, John S. Burke Catholic High School, Defendant-Respondent. Rivkin Radler LLP, Uniondale (Henry M. Mascia of counsel), for appellant. Hasapidis Law Offices, Scarsdale (Annette Hasapidis of counsel), for F.M, and J.C., respondents. Jeff Anderson & Associates, P.A., New York (Jack P. Boyd of counsel), for ARK407 Doe and ARK 193, ARK 183 and ARK 215, respondents. Janet, Janet & Suggs, LLC, New York (Rita M. Gribko of counsel), for John Doe JP, respondent. Matthews & Associates, New York (David P. Matthews of counsel), for J.K.G., respondent. Thomas Counselors at Law, LLC, New York (Kathleen R. Thomas of counsel), for V.P, respondent. Phillips & Paolicelli, LLP, New York (Michael H. McConnell of counsel), for PC-3 Doe, respondent. Seeger Weiss LLP, New York (Michael L. Rosenberg of counsel), for R.A., respondent. Herman Law, New York (Daniel Ellis of counsel), for P.B., respondent. Order, Supreme Court, New York County (Sabrina Kraus, J.), entered on or about December 12, 2024, which, after in camera review, directed defendant The Archdiocese of New York to disclose its Tribunal Laicization File concerning a former priest, subject to redactions of social security numbers and dates of birth, unanimously affirmed, without costs. [FN1] In this appeal arising out

of the Child Victims Act, plaintiffs allege that Francis J. Stinner sexually abused them while he was a priest in the Archdiocese. Plaintiffs further allege that although the Archdiocese was aware of Stinner's conduct against them, it nevertheless allowed him to continue in ministry. Eventually, after appointing a committee to consider the issue of whether Stinner's acts had violated ecclesiastical law, the Archdiocese laicized Stinner in 2005. Supreme Court providently exercised its discretion in directing the Archdiocese to produce an unredacted copy of the file of the Tribunal proceedings against Stinner. Plaintiffs' discovery demands are reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of relevant and admissible evidence bearing upon whether Stinner engaged in a pattern of abuse, whether the Archdiocese knew or should have known of the danger Stinner posed, and whether the Archdiocese acted reasonably to protect children from sexual abuse (see *Beals v Roman Catholic Archdiocese of N.Y.* , 242 AD3d 404 [1st Dept 2025]; see *J.L. v Roman Catholic Archdiocese of N.Y.* , 222 AD3d 483, 484 [1st Dept 2023]). Moreover, the Archdiocese did not demonstrate that the information sought implicated canon law or sacramental issues that might give rise to a First Amendment issue (see *McNierney v Archdiocese of N.Y.* , 221 AD3d 489, 489 [1st Dept 2023]). Although the records concern the church's removal of Stinner from the priesthood, the actions underlying this appeal do not contest or address that decision, nor do they address the religious doctrine upon which the decision was based (see *Matter of Congregation Yetev Lev D'Satmar, Inc. v Kahana* , 9 NY3d 282, 286 [2007]; *ARK292 Doe v Archdiocese of New York* , 242 AD3d 501, 502 [1st Dept 2025]). Rather, plaintiffs seek the file's contents to understand the Archdiocese's support or justification for laicizing Stinner, and as a potential source of information about the extent and timing of the church's knowledge. We have considered the Archdiocese's remaining contentions and find them unavailing. THIS CONSTITUTES THE DECISION AND ORDER OF THE SUPREME COURT, APPELLATE DIVISION, FIRST DEPARTMENT. ENTERED: January 6, 2026 Footnotes Footnote 1: This appeal is proceeding under the John Doe JP docket number. However, the lower court's order was applicable to twelve matters involving allegations of sexual abuse. Plaintiffs-respondents have jointly submitted one brief.

PER CURIAM.

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