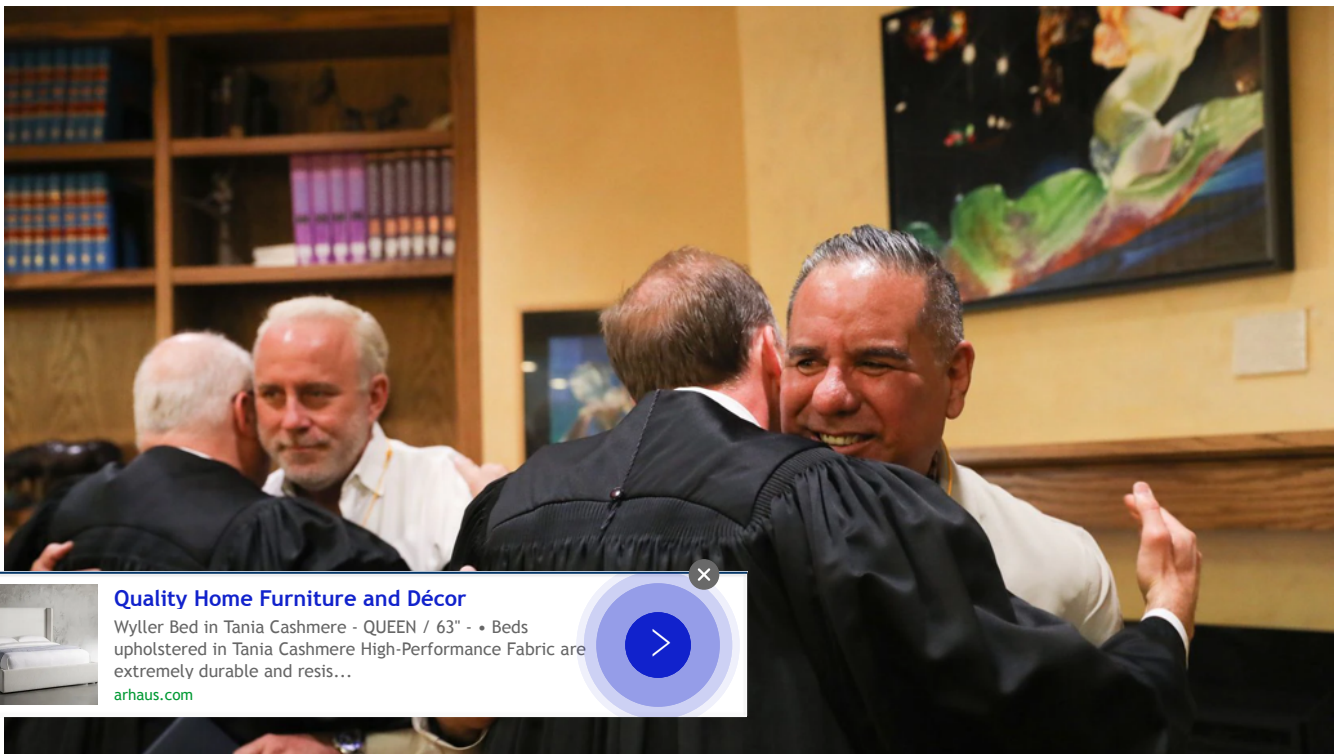


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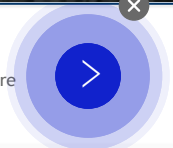
Two graduate from Jesuit Dallas 40 years after priest sex abuse

Jesuit College Preparatory School held a ceremony in honor of Jacques DeLira and Brendan Higgins, who left in the 1980s.



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Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas principal Tom Garrison embraces Jacques DeLira (right) while president Mike Earsing (left) and Brendan Higgins do the same at the special graduation ceremony on May 13, 2022 at the school in Dallas, Texas. (Liesbeth Powers / Special Contributor)

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By [Krista M. Torralva](#)

6:00 AM on May 16, 2022



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Jacques DeLira beamed as he accepted his high school diploma from Jesuit College Preparatory School. He looked to his family and friends, who cheered and applauded.

The diploma was about 40 years in the making.

At 57, DeLira was honored in a special graduation ceremony Friday, along with [Brendan Higgins](#), 54. They had dropped out in the 1980s after priests at the school [molested them](#).



Family, friends and legal representatives of Brendan Higgins and Jacques DeLira cheer as they are awarded honorary high school degrees by Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas on May 13, 2022 at the school in Dallas, Texas. (Liesbeth Powers / Special Contributor)

“I dreamt of this day for many years,” DeLira said.

The men belong to the classes of 1983 and 1986, respectively.



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DeLira's mother, Jo, cried softly during the intimate ceremony. She said his grandparents, who are deceased, were smiling down on her son.

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The family has a long legacy in the school. DeLira's grandfather performed maintenance and custodial work, and his grandmother did laundry. DeLira said his grandfather was crushed when he left.

"This school has produced so much good in my life. There's more good than bad," he said. "I cherish it and I always have."



Jacques DeLira (left) turns to his mother Jo DeLira after reading a card from her after his special graduation ceremony at Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas on May 13, 2022. (Liesbeth Powers / Special Contributor)

DeLira, Higgins and seven other men recently [sued the school](#), the Catholic Diocese of Dallas and the Society of Jesuits' USA Central and Southern province, which is the religious order that includes Dallas. The lawsuit alleged the men were sexually assaulted as boys by priests in the 1970s and early 1980s. The parties [reached a settlement](#) in March. The monetary details are confidential.

President Mike Earsing said he believed the graduation ceremony was a cathartic event following a traumatic and stressful lawsuit that [revealed the allegations](#) in detail.

Related: Former TV anchor Brendan Higgins among 9 Jesuit Prep alumni suing over alleged priest sex abuse

“To be able to bring joy in these two men’s lives and sort of close the loop on the reconciliation and healing was my goal,” he said. “I want them to be happy.”

DeLira walked around the room carrying congratulatory cards and money relatives had gifted him.

“Isn’t that funny? I’m 57 years old and getting high school graduation cards,” DeLira said.

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Brendan Higgins (right) kisses Dallas trial lawyer Charla Aldous on the head after receiving his honorary high school diploma from the Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas on May 13, 2022 at the school in Dallas, Texas. (Liesbeth Powers / Special Contributor)

Some of the men's former classmates attended, including a few who were involved in the lawsuit.

Higgins said not graduating from Jesuit always bothered him. Though he remained friends with classmates, he sometimes felt like an outsider.

Over the years, a [recurring nightmare](#) from his junior year has haunted him. He had it again the night before his graduation.

In the dream, Higgins is stuck in a meeting that occurred just before Christmas break. His parents are disappointed in him because he is failing his classes. In the room, just a few feet away, is the priest Higgins said molested him.



Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas president Mike Earsing (right) opened special graduation ceremony for Brendan Higgins (left) and Jacques DeLira on May 13, 2022 at the school in Dallas, Texas. (Liesbeth Powers / Special Contributor)

Tears brimmed in Higgins' eyes as Earsing placed a medal depicting St. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuit order, around his neck.

Higgins said he didn't realize he'd be so emotional. Leaving the ceremony, he was optimistic.

"My hope is that this painful recurring dream will be replaced with something more positive and regenerative," he said.

Fr. Philip Postell, S.J.
4/29/2021

Page 1

CAUSE NO. cc-19-05279-b

MICHAEL PEDEVILLA;)	IN THE COUNTY COURT
RICHARD ROE; JOHN SMITH;)	
DENNIS PETERSEN; CHARLES)	
JONES; ADAM WILLIAMS; SAM)	
BROWN; AND JAMES JOHNSON,)	
)	
Plaintiffs,)	
)	AT LAW NO. 2
VS.)	
)	
THE JESUIT PREPARATORY)	
SCHOOL OF DALLAS, INC.;)	
et al,)	
)	
Defendants.)	DALLAS COUNTY, TEXAS

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APRIL 29, 2021
VOLUME 1 OF 1
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Page 2

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[Krista M. Torralva](#), Staff writer. Krista Torralva first joined The Dallas Morning News as an intern on the business desk in 2013. She returned to The Morning News in 2021 as a reporter covering primarily Dallas County criminal courts. Krista graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington with a major in journalism and a minor in criminal justice.

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