



DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER
47 UNDERWOOD STREET
POST OFFICE BOX 2577
FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS 02722-2577

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 13, 2008

Dear Parishioners,

I regret to inform you that an allegation of improper sexual misconduct has been brought against Father Bento R. Fraga, a retired priest of the Fall River Diocese who served at your parish.

The allegation was brought to the attention of the Diocese in January and, according to policy, turned over to its Review Board for evaluation. After a full investigation, although Father Fraga has denied the allegation, the Board has determined that the allegation is credible. In cases like this, both diocesan policy and the U.S. Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* require that the accused priest be removed from ministry.

The Diocese has also reported the allegation to the Barnstable County District Attorney's Office.

The accusation is a single claim of sexual misconduct with a minor which allegedly occurred in 1979 at a private residence. At the time Father Fraga was serving as the pastor at Holy Ghost Parish in Attleboro. I encourage anyone who has information which might be of help in this matter to contact either Arlene McNamee of the Office of Child Protection of Catholic Social Services at 508-674-4681 or the Barnstable County District Attorney's Office at 508-362-8110 or the Bristol County District Attorney's Office at 508-997-0711.

Though formally retired as pastor since June 2005 and not assigned to any parish, Father Fraga retained the necessary "faculties" which allowed him to continue to minister as a priest to serve at his own preference. In retirement, he had decided to reside at St. Anthony Parish in Taunton, where he frequently assisted. As a result of the determination of the Review Board, he will no longer have faculties to minister nor live in housing affiliated with a parish or at the priests' retirement facility.

I am deeply troubled by this matter and understand how devastating the announcement of it is to former parishioners of Father Fraga and to his family and friends. I have asked that counselors from Catholic Social Services be present at this weekend's Masses at the parishes in Taunton where Father Fraga most recently served, St. Anthony's and St. Paul's, to offer whatever support they can. If there are others in need of such assistance, please speak to your pastor and arrangements can be made.

I wish to assure all of you of my prayers at this difficult time, and I ask you to remember in yours Father Fraga as well as the person who has brought forth this accusation.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

+ *George W. Coleman*
Bishop of Fall River