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## Vatican dismisses Fushek from clerical state following investigation

Robert DeFrancesco | February 16, 2010 | 1 Comment

A former East Valley pastor has been officially dismissed from the priesthood, officials for the Diocese of Phoenix announced Feb. 16.

Dale Fushek was recently notified of his dismissal from the clerical state, a process most often referred to as "laicization." The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had been investigating the former pastor of St. Timothy Parish in Mesa and one-time vicar general for the diocese for his alleged sexual abuse of minors. The Vatican's findings in that investigation resulted in his removal from the priesthood.

### Questions and Answers: On being dismissed from the clerical state

Pope Benedict XVI ordered the dismissal, according to a diocesan statement. This means Fushek is no longer bound to the duties and obligations he incurred upon ordination to the priesthood in 1978, and he no longer has the rights of a cleric under Church law. As a result, Fushek can no longer refer to himself as "reverend," "monsignor" and "father."

Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted received the "Decree of Dismissal" in January from the Vatican congregation, notifying him that the laicization had been imposed on Fushek as a penalty for acts of sexual abuse of minors.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addresses "sexual sins" perpetrated by priests and deacons against minors, according to Church law.

Fushek, 57, currently faces charges on several misdemeanor counts of sexual misconduct in San Tan Justice Court. The findings by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith relate to Fushek's status as a priest only, and have no bearing on any criminal or civil case that he may be involved in.

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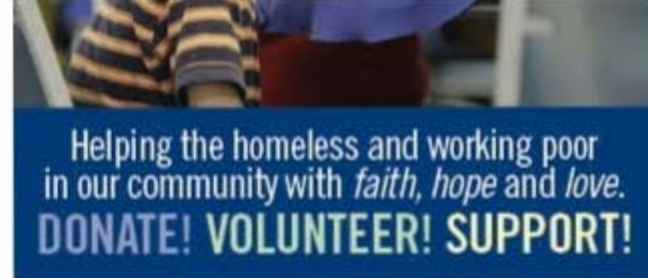


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"The Catholic Church is very concerned about the welfare and spiritual health of the alleged victims of sexual abuse by clergy," said Fr. Chris Fraser, judicial vicar for the Diocese of Phoenix.

The investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was initiated a few years ago, according to Fr. Fraser, who is an expert on Church law. The Diocese of Phoenix cooperated with their investigation once the allegations were found to have credibility.

Fushek was made aware of the investigation and of his right to defend himself. He was also invited to have canonical counsel.

Fushek was excommunicated from the Church in 2008 for his continued involvement with a small, Mesa-based faith assembly called the Praise and Worship Center — a censure that carried with it the consequence of being forbidden from receiving the Eucharist, celebrating Mass or participating in other sacraments of the Church. He was also barred from representing himself as a priest. Despite his dismissal from the clerical state, the penalty of excommunication remains in place, according to diocesan officials.

"There is no doubt that the Church has been scandalized by the abuse of minors by Catholic clergy," Fr. Fraser said. "What makes this case unique is that there is an additional scandal related to the schismatic activities of the Praise and Worship Center. Consequently, those who support and promote Fushek's public ministry must be mindful of the spiritual danger and grave harm their actions create by supporting and attending his services."

Fushek gained prominence throughout the 1980s and 1990s for co-founding Life Teen, an international youth ministry program. Bishop Olmsted suspended his faculties in late 2004 after an allegation was made that Fushek engaged in inappropriate behavior in the presence of a minor at the Mesa parish in 1985. Fushek later resigned as the pastor on June 30, 2005.

In the diocese's statement this week, Bishop Olmsted expressed his concern for Catholics who may be misled or confused by the continuing actions of Fushek, particularly as they relate to the Praise and Worship Center. Diocesan officials reminded Catholics that any ceremonies — baptisms, weddings, confessions, and the anointing of the sick — performed by Fushek or others at the Praise and Worship Center, are not legitimate sacraments for Catholics and would not be recognized by the Catholic Church.

The bishop asked for the diocese's Catholics to pray for reconciliation and healing in this situation.

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Category: Local News, News

### About the Author (Author Profile)



Robert DeFrancesco is the associate publisher of The Catholic Sun, the newspaper and website serving the faithful of the Diocese of Phoenix. He has been a member of The Catholic Sun since 2000. DeFrancesco also serves as the director of communications for the diocese.