

# Augustinian priest charged with sex abuse

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CEBU CITY—A sex scandal is rocking one of the country's oldest churches, the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño in this city.

A 21-year-old former altar boy has claimed that he and three others were sexually abused by a former rector of the basilica, Augustinian priest Apolinario "Jing" Mejorada, between 1998 and 1999.

In a letter to Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal on July 17, Dong (not his real name) said he would go public if the Church decides to look the other way and "allow pedophile priests like Mejorada to continue to harm young people."

Dong said they wanted Mejorada and the Augustinian Order to apologize formally to the three boys.

He also wanted Mejorada, 56, removed from all pastoral duties involving contact with children until he was fully rehabilitated.

The Cardinal was out of town and could not be reached yesterday.

"The boy should have waited for the Cardinal to call him and talk about the problem in private. That is how the Cardinal can be effective in this sense," said Msgr. Achilles Dakay, the archdiocesan media liaison officer, who added Vidal could not do anything now that the

issue had been publicized.

An insider at the archbishop's palace said Vidal had referred Dong's letter to Fr. Richard Pido, OSA, the Augustinian's Prior Provincial. The *INQUIRER* tried to reach Pido but his employees said he was out of town.

Mejorada could not be reached for comment also. He was reportedly in Batangas, undergoing psychiatric treatment.

Dong's father said the history of sexual abuse was narrated at length in a deposition, which is now with their lawyer.

In his letter to the archbishop, Dong said the Augustinian Order "conspired to hide Fr. Mejorada and generally discouraged our group from frequenting the basilica."

Fr. Ambrosio Galindez OSA, another Augustinian serving at the basilica, said Mejorada had admitted committing the wrongful acts and that he had apologized to the three boys.

A settlement had been arranged in October 2000 and Mejorada gave P120,000 to each of the three boys, Galindez claimed.

It was also agreed that Mejorada would be taken out of Cebu and sent to Africa as a "punishment."

Dong said he felt betrayed when he saw Mejorada at the Pilgrim Center in Cebu on May 25. He also learned that instead of being sent to

Africa, Mejorada was sent home to Bohol. The priest was also reportedly seen in Bacolod City and even

in Carcar town in Cebu.

Dakay also admitted seeing the priest in Cebu early this year.