

CHURCH SCANDAL

Augustinian priest sued for sex abuses

By Lino K. Parone Jr.
and Suzzane Salva
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Augustinian priest Apolinario "Jing" Mejorada, a former rector of the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, was charged on Tuesday with violation of the Child Abuse Act, the first priest in Cebu sued for allegedly sexually abusing boys.

The complaint for acts of lasciviousness was filed before the Cebu City prosecutor's office by a young man, one of the four former altar boys of the basilica who came out in the open in July last year, at the height of the sexual abuse scandals hitting the Catholic Church in the United States, hurling similar charges

against Mejorada.

They claimed that Mejorada sexually abused them in different occasions between 1995 and 1999.

The Augustinian priests who run the Basilica declined to comment on the filing of the complaint. The prior of the Augustinian community in Cebu, Fr. Ambrosio Galindez, had admitted to reporters on July 19, 2002 that Mejorada had owned up to the wrongdoing in a meeting with his fellow priests in the congregation.

It was later learned that before the scandal broke out, a monetary settlement of P120,000 was given to each of the altar boys in October 2000. It was also agreed that Mejorada would be assigned

to another country.

One of the victims told reporters in July that he was forced to spill the beans on Mejorada because he felt betrayed when he saw the priest on May 25, 2002 at the basilica despite assurances that he would be sent out of the country.

After the scandal broke out, Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal announced there would be an investigation. So far, no results have been released.

Mejorada has since left the basilica. He reportedly underwent intensive "spiritual renewal" in a Church-run facility in an undisclosed place in the country.

Church officials in Cebu were mum about the facility but

Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) president Archbishop Orlando Quevedo of Cotabato City had told the *INQUIRER* last year that the Church offers an intensive program of renewal for priests who have gone astray. He said the program aims to heal priests with the help of professional counselors, spiritual directors and psychiatrists.

The complainant, who is now in his early 20s, said he no longer expected to get justice from Church officials. This, he said, forced him to seek legal remedy.

"(Getting) no justice from within the Church leadership, I have decided to seek justice from the regular courts hoping that such dastardly acts of Fr. Jing

would be given due course in accordance with law," he said

A source, however, said Mejorada had actually been found guilty by the investigating team of the Cebu Archdiocese.

"The investigation was wrapped up last December and members of the committee convened by Cardinal Vidal were all convinced the accused is guilty. That was the official verdict," the source said Wednesday.

Under the Revised Code of Canon Law which governs the actions and responsibilities of diocesan and religious priests of the Catholic Church, Mejorada stood to receive "just punishments" including dismissal from the priesthood.