

## **Bishop places priest on leave**

### **Diocese of Brooklyn on clergy sexual abuse April 24, 2006**

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has placed a Brooklyn parochial vicar on administrative leave from active priestly ministry after accepting the Diocesan Review Board's finding that an allegation against the priest of inappropriate behavior with a young lady two decades ago was credible.

The Bishop announced his decision on the status of Father Paul Vazhapilly in a letter read to parishioners of SS. Simon and Jude Church, where he had served since 1997. Msgr. Kevin B. Noone, the Episcopal Vicar, read the letter at the conclusion of the four weekend Masses April 22-23.

As a priest on administrative leave, Father Vazhapilly may not present himself as a priest, celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments. He is permitted to offer Mass privately.

The Diocese will submit documentation on the matter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican "for its review and any direction it may wish to provide to our Diocese," said Bishop DiMarzio.

In his letter, the Bishop stated his concern for the well-being of the person who presented the allegation against the priest.

"On behalf of the Church, and in particular the Church in the Diocese of Brooklyn, I apologize publicly and profoundly to the victim for the suffering she has endured," he said.

"Even the passage of time has not dimmed the memory of a painful episode in her life," he added. The improper behavior took place when the priest served at Regina Pacis Church in Brooklyn.

In describing the process that led to the decision to remove the priest on administrative leave, Bishop DiMarzio said he presented the allegation to the eight-member Diocesan Review Board, comprised primarily of lay persons with experience in social services, family life, medicine, the law and law enforcement.

The board engaged a former detective for the New York Police Department to conduct a thorough investigation of the allegation. When the investigator completed a report, it was given to the board for analysis and review.

When the board found the allegation to be credible, the information was presented to the Bishop for his own review. The bishop said that while Father Vazhapilly denied the allegation, he determined that the facts contained in the review board's report were sufficient for him to reach the decision he announced in his letter.

The review board has served the diocesan bishop since early 2003. It is a

confidential consultative body that functions as directed by the "Essential Norms" that accompanied the U.S. bishops' 2002 "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

Bishop DiMarzio's letter repeated a call he has made many times for anyone who may have been a victim of improper behavior by a member of the clergy "to come forward and advise us."

He said he had established a toll-free telephone number "to facilitate the making of such a call"---(888) 634-4499. He said callers would be "treated courteously and with respect."

After the Masses at SS. Simon and Jude, Amityville Dominican Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, the diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator, and five members of the diocesan Healing Intervention Team were on hand to meet with parishioners who wished to discuss the news contained in the letter.

"This continues to be a challenging time for our Church," Bishop DiMarzio said. He asked the parishioners at SS. Simon and Jude to pray for the victim and for the priest, adding that he offered "my own prayers for you as you receive this distressing information."

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