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Attorney General

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August 26, 2019

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Catholic Priest Sentenced to Four Years in Prison for Sexually Assaulting Teenager in 1990s

First guilty plea secured by Attorney General's Clergy Abuse Task Force

New Jersey Clergy Abuse Hotline: 855-363-6548

NEW BRUNSWICK – Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal and Middlesex County Prosecutor Andrew C. Carey announced that a Roman Catholic priest was sentenced to prison today for sexually assaulting a teenage girl in the early 1990s. He is the first defendant to be charged and convicted by the Clergy Abuse Task Force formed by Attorney General Grewal in September 2018.

Father Thomas P. Ganley, 64, of Phillipsburg, N.J., was sentenced to four years in state prison by Superior Court Judge Diane Pincus in Middlesex County. He pleaded guilty on April 8 to second-degree sexual assault. In pleading guilty, he admitted that he engaged in sexual acts with the victim when she was 16 or 17 years old, at a time when he had supervisory authority over her. Ganley was a priest at Saint Cecelia Church in the Iselin section of Woodbridge when the criminal acts occurred and had supervisory authority over the victim as head of the Youth Ministry for the parish.

Ganley was investigated and prosecuted by members of the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office assigned to the New Jersey Clergy Abuse Task Force. Assistant Prosecutor Allysa Gambarella prosecuted Ganley and handled the sentencing hearing today.

At the time of his arrest on January 16, 2019, Ganley was assigned to Saint Philip & Saint James Church in Phillipsburg. Ganley was arrested just two days after the victim called the Clergy Abuse Task Force Hotline to report the sexual abuse. Ganley will be required to register as a sex offender under Megan's Law. He will be prohibited from having contact with the victim and from having unsupervised contact with children under 18

"This prison sentence demonstrates that we take these allegations of sexual abuse by clergy members very seriously and will act swiftly to secure justice for survivors," said Attorney General Grewal. "This case also shows that, even if the abuse occurred many years ago, charges may still be viable and we will pursue them vigorously. Where charges are in fact time-barred, we will work equally hard to determine if the Church was aware of the abuse but failed to take action or prevent it from recurring, which will be the subject of a state grand jury presentment and report. We'll do everything in our power to expose these past wrongs and hold wrongdoers accountable."

“We urge all survivors, witnesses of sexual abuse, and others with information to call our Clergy Abuse Hotline: 855-363-6548,” said Director Veronica Allende of the Division of Criminal Justice. “I commend the members of the Middlesex County Prosecutor’s Office who secured this guilty plea and prison sentence. We want survivors to know that we have experienced prosecutors and detectives in every county who will diligently pursue these cases as members of our Task Force.”

“This is the first conviction for our Task Force, but it should not be the last, as long as other survivors and witnesses see that justice can be served and are encouraged to come forward,” said former Acting Essex County Prosecutor Robert Laurino, who leads the Clergy Abuse Task Force. “Our message to survivors is that we will make every effort to hold their abusers accountable.”

Assistant Prosecutor Allysa Gambarella, Detective Paul Kelley, and Detective Julissa Alvarado handled the case for the Middlesex County Prosecutor’s Office, under the supervision of First Assistant Prosecutor Christopher L.C. Kuberiet.

When Attorney General Grewal formed the Clergy Abuse Task Force in September 2018, he also established a Clergy Abuse Hotline, **855-363-6548**, which is staffed by trained professionals and operated on a 24/7 basis. More than 540 calls have been received through the hotline to date.

Attorney General Grewal formed the New Jersey Clergy Abuse Task Force in response to publication of a report by a Pennsylvania grand jury outlining allegations of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests against more than 1,000 victims in that state, which were uncovered in a multi-year investigation led by Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro. The New Jersey task force was formed to investigate allegations of sexual abuse by members of the clergy within the Catholic dioceses of New Jersey, as well as any efforts to cover up such abuse. Attorney General Grewal appointed former Acting Essex County Prosecutor Robert D. Laurino, an experienced sex crimes prosecutor, to head the task force and oversee a team of detectives and prosecutors from all 21 New Jersey county prosecutors’ offices and the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ). Laurino reports directly to DCJ Director Veronica Allende. The Attorney General has authorized the task force to present evidence to a state grand jury, including through the use of subpoenas to compel testimony and the production of documents, in addition to other investigative tools.

In addition to investigating allegations of sexual abuse, the task force is conducting a comprehensive review of existing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between the Catholic dioceses of New Jersey and state law enforcement. These MOUs, entered in 2002, mandated that the dioceses establish policies and procedures to ensure their leaders and employees report information to prosecutors about potential cases of sexual abuse within their churches and cooperate in any resulting law enforcement investigations. The task force, as part of its mission, is determining whether the dioceses complied with the MOUs’ mandatory reporting requirements and whether any additional action is necessary.

Finally, the AG’s Clergy Abuse Task Force’s investigations are being done in a manner consistent with best-in-class guidelines governing the investigation of sexual assault cases. In November 2018, Attorney General Grewal issued AG Directive 2018-5, which created new requirements and enhanced oversight for sexual assault investigations and prosecutions. In addition, AG Grewal issued the Attorney General Standards for Providing Services to Victims of Sexual Assault, Third Edition, which established 14 protocols that prioritize the needs and concerns of victims. These steps marked the culmination of a multi-year process to improve the handling of sexual assault cases—a collaborative effort that involved prosecutors, healthcare professionals, services providers, and victim advocates.

Defense Attorneys: Assistant Deputy Public Defenders Richard Blache and Lindsay Gargano, Middlesex County.

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