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## **Immaculate Conception offers fresh start for new pastor**

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Dunne  
Courtesy OSFS

ELKTON — The new parochial vicar of Immaculate Conception Church was probably well-known by the congregation before he even arrived, because church officials had to clear his name.

The Rev. Gerald M. Dunne, OSFS, has been appointed to the church effective March 1. He arrived in town over the weekend, after completing his duties at St. John Neumann parish in Reston, Va.

A letter was sent to parishioners last month explaining that Dunne is a priest in good standing, having been cleared of false charges that he abused a child.

“Father Dunne was reinstated to the ministry in 2015 following exoneration from a false claim of child sexual abuse,” reads the Feb. 13 letter from the Wilmington-Philadelphia Province of the Oblates of St. Francis De Sales. “We wish to share why he has been reinstated to ministry so that you may have the whole picture in advance of his arrival.”

Dunne was named in a civil suit in 2009 over allegations of one incident of abuse 40 years ago in Delaware. It was part of a larger claim involving 40 other priests from various orders and the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington. According to the letter, the suits came at a time when legislators had waived statute of limitations regulations on the issue.

The father’s accuser never gave a deposition and details of the timeline and events could never be substantiated. The letter reads that some details were later deemed false.

“Furthermore, the Oblates produced polygraph tests and accounts from witnesses that evidenced no sexual abuse of a minor,” the letter reads.

Additionally, it states Dunne passed his polygraph test “with a degree of certainty far beyond the norm required for veracity.”

Dunne all along denied the allegation.

A parish meeting was held Feb. 21 to allow church members to hear the whole story and ask questions.

“There are some for whom this raises feeling,” said Father Jim Yeakel, OSFS, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church. “But overwhelmingly, by taking time to share, each group came to a place where they can welcome him.”

Yeakel said Dunne’s arrival was delayed because of all the going-away parties being held in his honor.

“He is a good guy,” Yeakel said. “He’s going to be a good priest.”

Efforts to find parishioners willing to talk about their feelings about the matter on the record were unsuccessful.

Dunne brings to ICC a background in both teaching, as he was on the faculty at Salesianum School in Wilmington, Del., and ministries, as he is a past director of Camp Brisson in North East.

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