

Priests Rally Behind Bishop After Revival of Sex Abuse Charges

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Priests of Naval diocese in the central Philippines have denounced revived accusations of sexual abuse against their bishop and allege that politicians may have orchestrated the recent attack.

Twenty-four priests defended their bishop in their *Statement of Truth Regarding the Person of Stephen Greinke and His Malicious Accusations Against the Bishop of Naval*.

The priests issued the Jan. 8 statement at their monthly meeting, Father Marvyn Maceda, the diocese's chancellor, told UCA News on Jan. 11.

He said priests would read the letter during Sunday Masses on Jan. 13 in the diocese based in Naval, capital of Biliran province, about 550 kilometers southeast of Manila.

The diocese serves all of Biliran and four northwestern

parishes of neighboring Leyte province.

In their statement, the priests noted that their bishop's accuser, Stephen Greinke, was an American missionary who established the Missionary Brothers of Perpetual Help (MBPH) in their province. Bishop Bactol dissolved the organization in 2003.

The Philippine immigration and deportation bureau cancelled Greinke's missionary visa and placed him on its List of Blacklisted Aliens in 2000, after he failed to answer charges based on accusations of sexual molestation from MBPH recruits, the priests' statement says.

It details the history of the American missionary's work. Greinke reportedly made temporary vows as a brother with the St. Louis Province of the U.S. Redemptorists from 1976 to 1979. He was with the Oakwood Province of the same order until the congregation granted him dispensation from his vows and obligations in 2000.

A June 13, 2006, statement attributed to Greinke on an Internet website log said he founded MBPH in Washington state, the United States, in 1989 and Bishop Bactol "invited" his group to Naval diocese the following year as an "apostolic union." Naval was erected in 1989.

He said he lived in the bishop's residence and served as his secretary for six months, during which he saw boys younger than 16 years sleeping in the bishop's room. He also reported as "common knowledge" that a Biliran priest fathered children with local women, and he said MBPH brother candidates had reported their priest confessor paid them for sex.

The statement called for Bishop Bactol's removal from office for violation of the Church law on celibacy, abuse of authority and "violations of the moral law of the Church."

Naval priests, in their January letter, wrote that Greinke's "unabashed hatred" against Bishop Bactol and the local clergy fueled his "vendetta" against the bishop, who failed to defend him when the American missionary was accused of sexual molestation in Naval.

They reported that Bishop Bactol issued a Decree of Dissolution/Suppression of the MBPH in Naval after "the diocese saw that the community Stephen Greinke established had gone morally and spiritually bankrupt."

They also noted that Church authorities have already dealt with Greinke's charges against their bishop and clergy through letters, including one addressed to Pope John

Paul II.

This prompted an investigation and visitation led by now-retired Archbishop Pedro Dean, who at the time headed Palo archdiocese and the ecclesiastical province to which Biliran belongs. Archbishop Dean's report to the apostolic nuncio in 2003, however, contained accusations against Greinke with affidavits from alleged victims of the missionary's sexual abuse.

In their recent statement, Naval clergy suspect politicians offended by the Church's anti-corruption efforts may be using Greinke "as a dispensable pawn in the bigger picture of dirty politics."

The diocese "has been actively educating against corrupt governance," including in the run-up to the May 14 election last year, Father Maceda explained to UCA News.

Bishop Bactol, 69, was appointed bishop of Naval in 1988. Born in Carigara town, Leyte province, he was ordained a priest in 1968 and appointed auxiliary bishop for Palo in 1981.

He compared Greinke's revived accusations to the "9/11" terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. Speaking to UCA News on Jan. 6, the bishop said they brought him

feelings of shame, depression and "many sleepless nights."

He added that he tries "to cope by praying" and meditates on Christ's last words as he was dying on the cross. He also said he feels consoled by "support" from priests and local people.

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