

## PH pastor arrested on sex abuse charge

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Father Romannilo "Nilo" S. Apura in an undated photo.

A 67-year-old New Jersey Filipino Catholic priest was arrested and charged last week with engaging in sexual conduct with a teenage boy.

Mercer County Prosecutor Joseph L. Bocchini Jr. said Father Romannilo "Nilo" S. Apura, pastor of St. Martha's Parish in Point Pleasant, N.J., is charged with endangering the welfare of a child and aggravated criminal sexual contact.

He was taken into custody at his residence on Aug. 21 by detectives of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Special Victims Unit, Bocchini said.

The prosecutor said Apura, who is originally from Borongan City in Eastern Samar, Philippines, fondled the 16-year-old at the boy's family home in Trenton, N.J. in late spring to early summer of 2014.

A second incident occurred in June 2014 when Apura attempted to remove the same boy's pants.

The Diocese of Trenton said it immediately alerted authorities after receiving a complaint which resulted to an investigation.

Apura, who has been suspended pending the outcome of the probe, had served at the Point Pleasant Parish since July 2012.

He is charged with one count of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child, one count of third-degree aggravated criminal sexual contact, and one count of fourth-degree attempt to commit criminal sexual contact.

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He is being held at the Mercer County Correction Center in lieu of \$100,000 cash or bond bail, according to the jail website.

As conditions of bail, state Superior Court Judge Pedro J. Jimenez Jr. ordered that Apura surrender his passport and have no contact with the victim or any other children.

Kevin Shea of Point Pleasant, a former newspaper reporter and parishioner of St. Martha's since 2005, said he is giving the priest the benefit of the doubt.

"I have known Father Nilo since the day he walked into our parish and I have worked with him on parish ministries, and nothing in his words or deeds would have ever led me to believe that Father Nilo would be accused of the allegations I learned about today," Shea told the *Asbury Park Press*.

"This is a stunner."

"Father Nilo has brought a greater sense of community to our parish and, in my opinion, has been nothing but a positive influence for St. Martha's," Shea added.

"The words 'innocent until proven guilty' come to mind very strongly right now."

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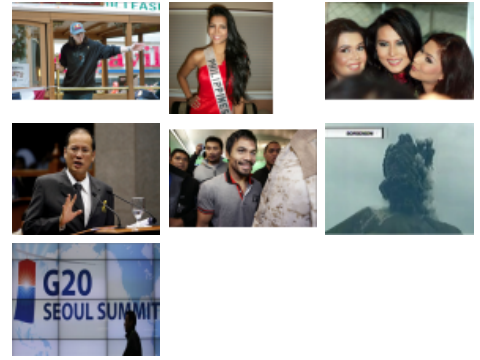
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