

NEWS

# Old US sex scandal hounds Bohol-based American priest

Published April 18, 2010 8:13pm

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/188764/old-us-sex-scandal-hounds-bohol-based-american-priest/story/>

A conviction over a sex abuse scandal more than 20 years ago continues to hound an American Catholic priest who was ordained in and continues to serve in the Philippines. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines reported that Bohol-based Fr. Joseph Skelton Jr. still could not shake off the bad publicity stemming from his conviction in 1988. "Under the circumstances all is not so well ... I don't know how to explain it," he said in an article posted on the CBCP [news site](#) Sunday. Skelton was ordained in the Philippines, with Bishop Leopoldo Tumulak ordaining him without knowing about his conviction. Tumulak, who was Tagbilaran bishop from 1992 to 2005, is

now serving as military bishop. The American priest is the priest-in-charge of the Sacred Music ministry of the Diocese of Tagbilaran and also serves as associate pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Calape town of Bohol, under the Diocese of Tagbilaran. Skelton's conviction for sexual misconduct came in 1988, while he was still a seminarian in Detroit, Michigan. The CBCP said he would be transferred to another assignment within the diocese next month. Tumulak said he met Skelton when Skelton was still a seminarian under the spiritual care and guidance of the late Bishop Felix Sanchez Zafra, Tagbilaran's third bishop at the time. He said he did not know about Skelton's conviction then, adding Zafra introduced him as a seminarian wanting to become a priest and a former member of a religious congregation. "Had I known of his conviction I would not have ordained him," Tumulak said, adding they at the Diocese of Tagbilaran had observed the prescribed canonical requirements prior to Skelton's ordination.

### **A happy and contented priest**

After his ordination to the priesthood, Tumulak observed the newly-ordained Skelton as happy, contented and very particular in celebrating the liturgy meaningfully and well." On the other hand, Tagbilaran Bishop Leonardo Medroso, an expert on Canon Law, said he found nothing wrong with Skelton's ordination to the priesthood. He was convicted before he became a priest and he has served his penalty of being under probation for three years," he said. He added that cases have

prescriptive periods and Skelton's case was a "misdemeanor." Medroso said he learned of Fr. Skelton's past only when a Manila-based newspaper published a story about it in November 2009. Another Canon Law expert, retired Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz, said the bishop has two options in cases where the seminarian conceals the crime and was revealed after his ordination. "The bishop can either impose on the priest the penalty of dismissal from the clerical state or ask the priest concerned to seek dispensation from the clerical state," Cruz said. He added cases like these are sent to Rome for the final decision. For his part, CBCP President Nereo Odchimar said clerical sexual abuse of minors is subject to special instructions "de gravioribus delictis" (on more grievous crimes) under the competence of the Congregation of the Clergy in Vatican City. **Civil suit** According to the Web site [Bishopaccountability.org](http://Bishopaccountability.org), Skelton resigned from a seminary in Michigan after pleading guilty to abusing a 15-year-old boy in a seminary room. In a separate civil suit in 2008, a man claimed Skelton, then a seminary student, abused him when he was 14. At the time, the youth was staying in the rectory's attic to avoid long commute. The case was settled for \$125,000, the Web site [said](#).

## **Reassignment**

In the Philippines, Skelton's reassignment stemmed more from his difficulties in delivering homilies in the far-flung villages, according to San Vincent Ferrer parish priest Fr. Aurelio Luzon

Jr. “[He was] having difficulty with his homilies in Cebuano though he can understand and talk a little in the native tongue,” he said. Dadoy Canton, parish secretary of St. Vincent Ferrer parish in Calape, Bohol since 1993, described Skelton as “mabait (kind).” He said Skelton was assigned in Calape since June 2009 and treats the people around him well. He said he did not know about the Skelton’s record until its publication in the newspapers. - **KBK, GMA News.TV**