

Sexual abuse hounds American priest

- Jessica Ann R. Pareja -

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CEBU, Philippines - A sin in the past is haunting a Catholic priest in Tagbilaran City, Bohol after the issue of his past conviction of a sexual misconduct was raised recently within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Father Joseph Skelton Jr., an American priest serving as an associate pastor of the St. Vincent Ferrer Parish in Calape town, is now threatened of being dismissed from his clerical position.

Debates on whether or not to strip Skelton of his faculties as a priest have been going on since last week after an article about his conviction while still in the seminary was published in the CBCP's website.

Skelton was convicted of sexual misconduct for sexually abusing a 15-year-old boy inside the St. John's Provincial Seminary in

Plymouth, where he studied Theology.

Skelton pleaded guilty to the case and resigned from the seminary in 1988 but was later ordained priest in Tagbilaran City in 2001.

Bishop Leopoldo Tumalak, who was then the Bishop of Tagbilaran during Skelton's ordination, said he met Skelton as a plain seminarian who wanted to become a priest. However, he said, had he known of Skelton's conviction, he would not have ordained him.

Skelton's conviction was made known to the Diocese of Tagbilaran only in October 2009, when a US-based organization, The Survivor Network of those Abused by Priests, published their objection to his ordination in the Philippines on a national daily.

However, the diocese did not take any action at the time until the issue was raised again recently. The priest's fate now lies in the Vatican.

"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," said CBCP President Nereo P. Odchimar.

Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Emeritus Oscar Cruz also agreed

that cases like these are sent to Rome for the final decision.

(FREEMAN NEWS)