

Paterson priest resigns following sex charges

By KARL JOHNSON

The rector of Paterson's Roman Catholic cathedral has resigned amid allegations that he sexually assaulted two teenage boys, church officials said.

Msgr. Jose Alonso, the administrator of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist since 1973, resigned last week and is now in a church-affiliated evaluation and treatment center in New Mexico, said Tim Manning, director of communications for the Diocese of Paterson.

In a statement he released yesterday on behalf of the diocese, Manning confirmed that Alonso resigned "following allegations of sexual misconduct."

"The allegations were made while Msgr. Alonso was on vacation," Manning added. "He resigned upon his return."

Manning said Alonso had returned from a vacation in Puerto Rico at the beginning of last week and was informed of the allegations.

Rector of Catholic cathedral sent to New Mexico treatment center

He resigned immediately, Manning said, and went to the evaluation center.

According to Manning, the allegations against Alonso were made sometime last month by two teenage brothers from Paterson. He could not say how they knew Alonso.

"As soon as the allegations were brought to the attention of the Paterson diocese, diocesan officials notified DYFS," Manning said, referring to the state Division of Youth and Family Services. The Paterson police were also notified.

Acting Passaic County Prosecutor John P. Goceljak confirmed yesterday that Alonso is under investigation by his office following the allegations, which

were referred to the prosecutor's office by the Paterson police.

"We hope to have something definite within a month," Goceljak said of the investigation.

He added that investigators were informed by the diocese that Alonso would be going out of state to a treatment center and were not worried that he was leaving their jurisdiction.

"We've been assured he'll be available if and when we need him," Goceljak said. "We know where he is."

Manning said a statement about Alonso was read to parishioners of the cathedral on Sunday and the Rev. Raul Guzman, an associate pastor since 1980, was named the new administrator to replace Alonso.

The church at Grand and Main streets in downtown Paterson has about 2,000 parishioners, Manning said. A landmark, it serves as the central church for the 353,000-member diocese, which includes portions of Passaic, Morris and Sussex counties.

Alonso had worked in other Paterson parishes before being named administrator of the cathedral in 1973.

Manning said the diocese is eager to offer help to both Alonso and the alleged victims of the sexual misconduct.

"Out of a sense of Christian concern and responsibility to persons in need of the church's pastoral care, the diocese has offered psychological counseling to the alleged victims and their family," he said in his statement.

"The diocese's response is prompted by a desire to provide pastoral care without making a judgment of the alleged misconduct," he added. "We are concerned about all the people in this situation. They all need the church's compassion and support."