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Priest's Sex Arrest Stuns B'klyn Parish

By Martin Mbugua
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The arrest of a beloved Brooklyn priest in the sexual abuse of a teenager has shocked a parish that trusted him with its kids.

The Rev. Frank Capellupo, the 52-year-old pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Bushwick, was arrested Monday night after police received complaints that he had taken advantage of the 14 year-old boy.

The teen had moved into the rectory in April 1999 to escape family problems.

"You don't know people anymore," said Nolan Quijano, whose 12-year-old son was baptized at the parish. "You don't know what they are capable of doing."

Quijano, a retired Navy petty officer and member of Capellupo's parish, called him "a very nice priest."

"I'm surprised because he's a [priest]," said Luis Rosario, 25, a doorman who lives near the church. "It is very bad. We are very concerned."

Capellupo was arraigned in Brooklyn Criminal Court yesterday and charged with sodomy, sexual abuse, harassment and endangering the welfare of a child. Released on his own recognizance, he was ordered to appear June 29 for a hearing.

A spokesman for the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, Frank DeRosa, said Capellupo strongly denied the charges. "But the diocese is taking the charges seriously, to see if they are true," DeRosa said.

"The diocese has placed him on an administrative leave, which means that he will not be functioning in the parish for the time being, and that he will undergo a psychological evaluation. We are concerned about the well-being of the boy and his family, as well as Father Capellupo," DeRosa said.

Assistant District Attorney Morris Fodeman told the court the priest sexually abused the boy the night of June 2 and early the next morning. Police arrested him after the boy's mother filed a complaint.

Capellupo, ordained 25 years ago, grew up in East Glendale, Queens. He has served as parish priest at Fourteen Holy Martyrs and St. Leonard's parishes in Bushwick, St. Michael's parish in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and Most Precious Blood Parish in Long Island City, Queens.

Capellupo, who speaks Spanish, founded and ran Independence House, a group home for troubled teens, in Bushwick in 1983.

Quijano said the priest was well-liked and had raised no suspicions within the neighborhood.

"We did not think that he would ever do anything like that," Quijano said, "because he was very close to children."