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## Ex-pastor of St. Leo's Abused Boy in '70s, Parish Told

By Julie Bykowicz

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<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/bal-md.br.priest30dec30,0,4197846.story>

Parishioners at St. Leo's Catholic Church in Little Italy were informed at weekend Masses that their former pastor - who was removed suddenly more than a year ago - molested a 13-year-old boy in the late 1970s at a New York church. Michael Salerno, better known as "Father Mike," was a brother at All Saints Church in Brooklyn when the alleged abuse occurred.

When the allegation surfaced last November, Salerno left his post at St. Leo the Great Roman Catholic Church. Parishioners immediately protested, demanding answers.

In a letter dated Dec. 28, the head of the Pallottine Fathers, the order that runs St. Leo's, apologized for the delay. "I regret that the investigation took so long to complete, since I know it has been a painful process for many, especially those in the St. Leo's community," the Rev. Peter T. Sticco wrote.

He said the final report of the investigation by the Diocese of Brooklyn "confirms that Michael Salerno did sexually abuse a boy." It was unclear yesterday whether Salerno will be criminally charged. The victim was not identified.

Salerno, 62, joined the Pallottines as a brother (a lay member who has taken vows) in 1968. Before he was ordained in 1993, he served at two Brooklyn, N.Y., parishes, a parish on Long Island, a Catholic high school in New Jersey and a Brooklyn homeless shelter.

Salerno arrived at St. Leo's in 1997, and became a beloved leader. He is credited with revitalizing the church - and part of Little Italy - growing St. Leo's congregation from about 100 members a decade ago to about 800. Sean Caine, a spokesman for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, released Sticco's letter yesterday. Caine said it is up to the Vatican to determine whether Salerno should be defrocked. Salerno could not be reached to comment. Caine said Salerno is "in the care of the Pallottines" and is not allowed to serve as a priest in any capacity.

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