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Jamaica Pastor Is Placed on Leave

The Tablet
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Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has placed a Queens pastor on administrative leave from active priestly ministry after accepting the Diocesan Review Board's finding that an allegation against the priest of inappropriate behavior with a young man more than two decades ago was credible.

The bishop announced his decision on the status of Father Robert J. McConnin in a letter read to parishioners of St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, where he had served as pastor since 1997. Father John W.

Maloney, the Episcopal Vicar, read the letter at the conclusion of the six weekend Masses Feb. 10-11.

As a priest on administrative leave, Father McConnin may not present himself as a priest, celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments, the letter said. He is permitted to offer Mass privately.

Bishop DiMarzio said the diocese will submit documentation on the matter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican "for its own review and any direction it may wish to provide to our Diocese as to any further action it wishes us to take."

In his letter, the bishop apologized to the victim "on behalf of the Church and in particular of the Diocese of Brooklyn, for the emotional suffering he has endured over these many years." He said "even the passage of time" has not caused him to forget "a difficult experience encountered at an early stage in his life."

The bishop asked the parishioners of St. Nicholas of Tolentine "to pray for the person who came forward with the allegation" and also to remember "the good works he (Father McConnin) has performed in more than 33 years of his priesthood." The allegation did not come from someone who had any association with the Jamaica parish.

The diocesan toll-free line established by the diocese in 2004 received the report of the allegation, which was presented to the Diocesan Review Board, a panel of eight ½ mostly laypersons ½ experienced in social services, family life, medicine, the law and law enforcement. The bishop described them as persons of "outstanding integrity and good judgment" who are "generous in their commitment to serving the Church on these difficult matters."

After an investigation, the review board prepared a report that concluded that the allegation was credible and presented the findings to the bishop for his consideration. The bishop studied the report and reached the decision that he announced in his letter to the parishioners.

Bishop DiMarzio said the Kings District Attorney's Office was notified when the diocese received the report of the allegation.

Healing Team

Ten members of the Diocesan Healing Intervention Team were available following the Masses to speak with parishioners who wanted to comment on the information they heard. Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, O.P., the diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator, said the reactions were of "shock and

surprise."

Bishop DiMarzio's letter invited "anyone who as a minor was the victim of improper behavior by a member of the clergy of this Diocese" to report the information to the diocesan toll-free reporting line: (888) 634-4499.

"As in the case presented here," the letter said, "a caller will be treated courteously and with respect."

Stating that "this continues to be a challenging time for our Church," Bishop DiMarzio said he was praying for the parishioners of St. Nicholas of Tolentine "as you receive this disturbing information."

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