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## Bishop Criticized for Letting Suspended Monsignor Say Masses

By Bruce Lambert  
The New York Times [Long Island NY]  
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A group of Roman Catholics on Long Island is criticizing their bishop for allowing a few Masses to be celebrated by a former high church official who was suspended from the ministry because of child-molestation complaints.

The former official, Msgr. Alan J. Placa, was vice chancellor of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. He supervised its hospitals and as a lawyer helped forge its policies on sex-abuse cases.

Last year, Bishop William F. Murphy suspended Monsignor Placa, pending a review of accusations that he molested boys decades ago, a charge he vehemently denied. Since then, he has worked for the Giuliani Partners firm run by his childhood friend Rudolph W. Giuliani.

On Tuesday, the Long Island chapter of Voice of the Faithful, which was formed in reaction to church sex-abuse scandals, alerted its members that Monsignor Placa had said Mass.

The chapter's co-chairwoman, Dr. Patricia Zirkel, said that he should not be allowed to say Mass and that his actions violated Bishop Murphy's claim that "there is no priest with any credible allegations of sexual abuse made against him in any kind of pastoral ministry in this diocese."

A chapter board member, Janet J. Godfrey, said she feared for the safety of children at a Mass with Monsignor Placa. "As a parent and a Catholic, I'm outraged," she said.

But the bishop's spokeswoman, Joanne C. Novarro, accused the group of "more mischief-making."

Monsignor Placa offered "less than half a dozen" Masses, she said, including a baptism in his family and the funerals for his mother and Mr. Giuliani's mother. Each time, the parishioners invited him, each time the bishop gave permission and the monsignor was never alone with children, Ms. Novarro said.

The activities did not violate the ban on ministry by accused abusers, Ms. Novarro said. "We never said that this wouldn't happen for those who were in that limbo state" while being investigated, she said.

Ms. Novarro also questioned whether credible allegations existed against the monsignor. A diocese review panel "could not reach a decision" on his case and forwarded it to the Vatican for study, she said.

One man has said that as a young boy he was groped by the monsignor. A Suffolk County grand jury report said that an unidentified "Priest F," which Monsignor Placa said referred to him, made improper advances "again and again and again." The report called him "cautious but relentless in pursuing his victims" and said he had groped schoolboys, hiding his moves behind a newspaper, book or poster.

But the report was vague on how many people had complained. His supporters say there was only one accuser and called him disturbed.

Responding to a request for Monsignor Placa's comment on the latest dispute, a spokeswoman said

that he had obtained permission for the Masses and referred questions to the diocese.

Supporters say that the monsignor was a pioneer in confronting sex abuse in the church, and he has said that he rooted out abusive priests and sought counseling for victims. But critics quoted him as saying that his job was to protect the institution and its priests, not the children.

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