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## Food for the Poor Fires 2nd Fund-Raising Priest

By Peter Franceschina  
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A Diocese of Palm Beach clergyman was stripped of his rights to act as a priest and was fired on Monday from his fund-raising position at Food for the Poor, said Angel Aloma, executive vice president of the Deerfield Beach-based charity.

Aloma said on Friday he did not know why Matthew Fitzgerald, 59, lost his faculties, which authorize priests to carry out their duties such as saying Mass and performing marriages and baptisms. Fitzgerald has been with the Diocese of Palm Beach about a decade, according to church directories that list him as being "on leave."

Diocese spokesman Sam Barbaro said he could not respond to questions about Fitzgerald's tenure or status with the diocese.

Fitzgerald was fired from Food for the Poor the same day as the Rev. Richard Farwell, 54, of the Diocese of Charlotte, N.C., because he, too, had his faculties revoked, Aloma said. Both men told their bosses about the loss of their privileges last week, but Aloma said he doesn't know why the two dioceses made those decisions.

"They were good employees, and we are sorry to lose them, but we don't want to get into the why of it," he said.

Fitzgerald came to the charity with a letter recommending him for the position, Aloma said, adding that he thinks Fitzgerald's letter would have been written by former Diocese of Palm Beach Bishop Anthony O'Connell, who resigned on March 8 after a former seminary student accused him of sexual abuse 25 years ago.

"All of our priests have to come with a letter of clearance by their bishop. That is standard procedure," Aloma said.

Food for the Poor is the largest charity in South Florida, having raised \$1 billion over the past 20 years to help people in the Caribbean through religious organizations. The Catholic Church has been a major supporter of the charity, and Food for the Poor pays about 35 priests nationwide to help raise money, Aloma said.

Fitzgerald worked for Food for the Poor since May 2000, and Farwell worked for the charity since August 2000. Both men were based in Deerfield Beach and responsible for bringing in donations from large contributors, Aloma said. "They cultivate for major gifts," he said, adding the two are the only priests to have been fired from the charity recently for losing their faculties.

Food for the Poor uses priests to go into churches and homes to perform their duties and raise money, so it is essential that they be able to carry out a public ministry and the sacraments as part of their jobs, Aloma said. "Once the faculties are lost, we know they can no longer function for us as a priest," he said.

Fitzgerald is listed in church directories at St. Ignatius Loyola Cathedral in Palm Beach Gardens in 1990. In June 1991, church officials said he was being transferred to Ascension in Boca Raton. The

1993 directory lists Fitzgerald at St. Lucie in Port St. Lucie, but, that September, church officials announced he was going to Our Lady of Lourdes in Boca Raton. In September 1996, he became pastor of St. Lucie. The diocese's directory for 1999-2001 lists Fitzgerald as "on leave."

The Charlotte Observer reported Friday that Farwell's privileges were revoked for alleged sexual misconduct with a minor about 20 years ago, after the minor's family wrote a letter to the Charlotte Diocese to make a second complaint against him. The allegation had first been made to the diocese in 1999, but it was not deemed "credible" at that time, the paper quoted spokeswoman Joann Keane as saying.

Keane could not be reached for comment on Friday. Under the Charlotte Diocese's new, stricter policy for addressing sexual misconduct allegations, Farwell was placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an investigation.

Farwell also came to Food for the Poor with a letter of recommendation from his bishop, Aloma said. Keane told The Charlotte Observer the letter was written because the 1999 allegation was found not to be credible.

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