

Catholic Diocese of Palm Beach

Diocese of Palm Beach
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Diocese of Palm Beach is posting this response to our website for those who wish to read the truth and a more detailed response than what the media is printing or airing in regards to the allegations made against the diocese by Father John Gallagher.

(Palm Beach Gardens, FL) January 28, 2016 – “The Diocese of Palm Beach is deeply disheartened and troubled by the allegations of Father John Gallagher against the Diocese of Palm Beach. Our diocese can no longer stand by in relative silence when we know the allegations are a complete inaccurate representation of the facts. Though we have released our statements stating how the Diocese of Palm Beach proactively and appropriately responded to the incident with Father Palimattom and stated Father Gallagher’s reassignment was not related to that particular incident, we are compelled by the manner in which the media is presenting this case to speak out further to be certain all sides and facts of this story are known. We feel it is especially important that this information is made available to the community and in particular to our faith congregations.

The Diocese of Palm Beach acted in a prompt, thorough, and cooperative manner in regard to Father Palimattom. Father Gallagher was not in any way demoted or removed because of the incident. He was not named as pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Church for a number of reasons not related to the incident involving Father Palimattom. He was given a new assignment with all the reasons explained to him. Access to his residence was never denied him, nor was he refused sacraments. At his request, he was placed on leave and continues to receive salary, health insurance and benefits.

The policy of the Diocese of Palm Beach in regard to allegations of sexual abuse is to follow the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, established in June 2002. The Charter is a comprehensive set of procedures for

addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy or other Church personnel. The Charter also includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability, and prevention of future acts of abuse. The Charter and Diocesan policies and procedures can be found on our website at www.diocesepb.org/safe-environments.

Additionally, our diocese has a set of Reporting Procedures for Allegations of Sexual Abuse Against Minors. These guidelines are given to all priests, religious, employees and volunteers. Father Gallagher alleges the Diocese of Palm Beach ignored these guidelines when in fact we know the Administration Offices of the Diocese did follow those procedures and our records show Father Gallagher did not.

Our Reporting Guidelines (in English, Spanish and Creole) are available on our website, in our Employee Handbooks and we require all the Churches and schools in our diocese to post these guidelines in several public places at their facilities. We would like to now go through the steps with you in response to the recent published allegations.

REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS and VULNERABLE ADULTS

STEP 1 The person receiving the allegation immediately makes an oral report to 1-800-96ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). Notes should be taken including names, dates, and times, and a log should be kept of all telephone calls made.

STEP 2 The person receiving the allegation makes an oral report to the Chancellor of the Diocese of Palm Beach at 561-775-9507, (cell 561-373-7990) who reports it to the bishop and diocesan attorney.

STEP 3 The diocesan attorney reports the allegation to the state attorney.

STEP 4 The person receiving the allegation informs the school principal, pastor or the appropriate immediate authority.

STEP 5 The person receiving the allegation sends a written report to the Department of Children and Families within 48 hours. Instructions regarding information to be included in this report are available from your entity's pastor, principal, or administrator or the Chancellor's office

As listed above in Step #1 the person receiving the allegation is to report the allegation immediately to an abuse number and Step #2 states the person receiving the allegation must make an oral report to the Chancellor of the diocese. Father Gallagher has publicly stated that he contacted the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office the night of Jan. 4 when the sheriff's report shows that night it was only the family of the youth who contacted them. The youth's father was the first and only person to contact law enforcement that night. Further, when the Diocese of Palm Beach was told of the incident by Father Gallagher on the next day, the diocese reported

the allegation to law enforcement. The sheriff's office told the diocese that the youth's father had reported it already. There was no mention of Father Gallagher reporting the allegation.

Though Step #2 of the Reporting Procedures state the Chancellor is to be contacted after the authorities are notified, the Diocese of Palm Beach did not receive any oral or written communication about the incident from Father Gallagher on the evening of the incident. Father Gallagher did not contact the Chancellor until the next day, the morning of January 5. Upon learning of the allegation, the Diocese of Palm Beach immediately contacted authorities and followed our own Reporting Procedures which include contacting law enforcement and the State Attorney. It is part of the policy/procedures of the Diocese of Palm Beach that although law enforcement has been contacted, and upon learning of any allegation, our diocesan attorney must provide a written report to the State Attorney about the incident. As we stated, this was in fact done on January 5.

Immediately upon learning of the allegation and for the next hours, days and weeks, the Diocese of Palm Beach continued to offer whatever assistance which law enforcement might need in a transparent manor. In fact, we were encouraged when we learned of the existence of the video showing the interaction between Father Palimattom and the youth as they looked at the visiting priests' cell phone. We were encouraged because such video would be a benefit to law enforcement and the State Attorney as they pursued bringing charges and prosecuting Father Palimattom, ultimately putting him in jail where he would not be able to harm any other youth.

Clarification on Father Palimattom

The Diocese of Palm Beach also wishes to address allegations regarding what happened to Father Palimattom, the visiting priest from India, once the allegation was reported to the diocese.

Upon learning of the allegation, Bishop Barbarito immediately suspended all priestly faculties which were previously granted to Father Palimattom, so that he did not have permission to provide any ministry within our Diocese nor even present himself as a priest. The Diocese contacted the Minister Provincial of the Franciscan Province of St. Thomas the Apostle in India to which Father Palimattom belongs. As you are aware, Father Palimattom served time in jail for the criminal charges brought against him. In abundance of caution, even though Father

Palimattom is not a priest of this Diocese, the Diocese of Palm Beach reported the allegations to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome to ensure Father Palimattom's provincial would be contacted by Rome. Though we are required to report allegations against our diocesan priests to that Vatican Office, we are not required to report a visiting priest, but felt it was a measure the diocese should take. We were following the Canonical process and our diocesan reporting procedure.

It is worthy to note that the Diocese of Palm Beach did not invite Father Palimattom to our diocese. He was invited by Father Gallagher. When he told us he had done so, the Diocese began our due diligence. It is the policy of the Diocese of Palm Beach to conduct a full background screening when a visiting priest wishes to visit and/or minister within our Diocese. Part of Father Palimattom's screening included a background screening conducted in India as well as receipt of a *Certificate of Aptitude* from the Minister Provincial in India that essentially approved Father Palimattom's ministerial work, granted permission for him to come to our Diocese, and assured us that there is nothing in his past that would indicate that he might deal with minors or adults in an inappropriate manner. During this screening process, no prior misconduct was revealed.

Gallagher's Other Allegations

We reiterate our earlier statements that the Diocese of Palm Beach deems the other allegations made by Father Gallagher to be a complete inaccurate reflection of the facts including the following:

Father Gallagher's reassignment was not related to the incident with the visiting priest. When priests are assigned to lead a parish, they are first named as Parochial Administrator, not Pastor. This is a probationary assignment, as is clear in their letters of appointment. The position of parochial administrator is, by its nature, not a permanent position, but a period of adjustment and evaluation for both the priest's sake and the parish's. Towards the end of the first year, a committee assists Bishop in evaluating, taking many things into account – especially the congregation's input and various events that may have taken place during that year. For many reasons that **did not include** the incident of Father Jose Palimattom it was determined that Father Gallagher would not be named Pastor at the end of the year, and he was assigned to a different parish as Parochial Vicar, to begin July 1, 2015. He never took the assignment because he asked to be put on Medical Leave, which was granted by Bishop Barbarito.

Father Gallagher alleges the locks on his former parochial house were changed, leaving him homeless. That is false. The Diocese of Palm Beach was not negligent in providing housing. Father Gallagher was given a new assignment with residence.

Father Gallagher alleges the Diocese of Palm Beach forced him to take a medical leave and has, quoting from the allegations, “ostracized him from the Church.” Father Gallagher requested a medical leave freely on his own and has been deficient in informing the Diocese of his current residence. During this leave he has received full salary, insurance and benefits.

During his hospitalization, Bishop Barbarito visited Father Gallagher providing pastoral care and support for a diocesan priest. Father Gallagher was never denied receipt of the Sacraments.

Established Procedures – Creating Safe Environments

The Diocese of Palm Beach, the Catholic Church and Pope Francis recognize the grave harm victims of sexual abuse have endured suffering often at the hands of someone they trusted: someone they had every right to trust: in this particular reference a member of the Catholic priesthood.

As a Catholic Church we apologize for the grave harm that has been inflicted on any victims by clergy or Church personnel. Words alone cannot express our sorrow, shame and disappointment for the past. The Church is indebted to victims of abuse who have come forward. Their witness has allowed the healing process to begin and has made the Church safer for all families.

We pray that victims, all victims of abuse, will find the healing they so richly deserve.

Yet there are those who fail to recognize all the work the Church has done since 2002 to improve how abuse cases are handled and continues to do to this present day and will do in the future.

The Catholic Church in the U.S. has the strongest measures in the world in place for protecting children and young people, including safe environment training for children and adults, background checks and a zero tolerance for sexual abuse.

- We train everyone to prevent, recognize and report abuse. This includes our clerics, employees and volunteers.
- We also train children in personal-safety and awareness programs. These programs are done in a classroom setting in all of our diocesan schools, religious education classes and are available online on our website.
- We provide outreach to those abused.
- We require background checks of all clerics, employees and volunteers.
- We report all allegations to the public authorities.
- We cooperate fully with law enforcement.
- Our diocese has Diocesan Policies and Codes of Conduct that pertain to the safety of children and young people.
- We have a Victims' Assistance Coordinator who provides support and assistance to those abused.

Each year the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops conducts an audit of every diocese to ensure they are following the guidelines of the Bishops' Charter and its own diocesan policies. The Diocese of Palm Beach is audited every year (13 times to date) and has been found in complete compliance each time. The Diocese has even received commendations for some of the innovative things initiated in this area of creating a safe environment for young people and vulnerable adults.

The Diocese of Palm Beach's Office of Safe Environments conducts the VIRTUS Program "Protecting God's Children" Workshops for all those who work with or come in contact with young people as well as any adults wishing to attend. They also provide education to all students in the Diocese's parochial schools and parish religious education classes.

Nationally, **well more than 2.5 million people** active in the church – clergy, vowed religious, lay ministers, teachers, coaches, administrators, volunteers and parishioners – have been trained to recognize and respond to signs of inappropriate behavior, thus preventing abuse. Programs like these give us the tools we need to protect children and combat abuse, equipping the Church to remain a powerful force for good. All 198 dioceses and archdioceses in the U.S. (100%) have adopted the bishop's charter.

In the Diocese of Palm Beach since 2002:

- **30,000 clergy, religious and lay people have been through the background screening process.**
- **30,000 have completed the training of the VIRTUS “Protecting God’s Children” workshop.**
- **Every 5 years those who have been background screened are screened again.**

All VIRTUS Workshops are available for anyone to attend. The schedule is listed on the diocesan website along with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Code of Conduct*. The website also lists all the other programs and workshops the diocesan Office of Safe Environments provides to children and young people to keep them safe. There are parental tips on internet and texting and more. The diocesan website is **www.diocesepb.org** Look under the *Offices* button and then select from the drop down menu *Safe Environments*. You can also call the diocesan Office of Safe Environments at 561-775-9500.

Additionally the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops has similar information on its website plus more resources, videos and information for parents. You can find it at **www.usccb.org** Look under the *Issues and Action* button and then select from the drop down menu *Child & Youth Protection*.

Pope Francis:

Sexual abuse is an issue we’ve heard Pope Francis discuss and we are encouraged and follow the example set by our Holy Father. When in the U.S. last fall, Pope Francis met with victims of clergy abuse and told them “Words cannot fully express my sorrow for the abuse you suffered. You are precious children of God who should always expect our protection, our care and our love.”

Pope Francis also has acted on the issue. Last year he formed the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. And this past summer he created a tribunal for bishop negligence in clergy sexual abuse cases.

The Diocese of Palm Beach wishes to assure the faith community we take all allegations of sexual abuse very seriously and we have strong procedures in place that are followed by the administration offices of the diocese.

It is most regrettable the hurt which this current distressing matter has caused our faith family, and once again to the entire parish family of Holy Name of Jesus and the family involved in the original incident. The Diocese of Palm Beach asks for prayers for all involved, including mercy and prayers for Father Gallagher. We greatly appreciate those who have offered their support and prayers to the diocese during this disappointing period of time.”

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