

JERSEY MAYHEM

# Point Pleasant priest arrested on sex abuse charge

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POINT PLEASANT – The Catholic pastor of St. Martha Parish was arrested Thursday and charged in connection with the sexual abuse of a 16-year-old boy in Trenton, police said.

## Brick cop indicted on charges of stalking girlfriend

The Rev. Romannilo S. Apura, 67, who has been pastor since July 2012, was taken into custody at 11 a.m. at his residence by detectives with the Mercer County Prosecutor's Special Victims Unit, according to Mercer County Prosecutor Joseph L. Bocchini Jr.

## Toms River man charged in dog's death

Apura is charged with one count of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child, one count of third-

degree aggravated criminal sexual contact and one count of fourth-degree attempt to commit criminal sexual contact.

Apura is being held at the Mercer County Correction Center in lieu of \$100,000 cash or bond bail, according to the jail website.

According to a statement by Bocchini, Apura masturbated the teenage boy in a home in Trenton on one occasion in the late spring to early summer of 2014. A second incident occurred in June 2014 when Apura attempted to remove the same boy's pants.

As conditions of bail, state Superior Court Judge Pedro J. Jimenez Jr. ordered that Apura surrender his passport and have no contact with the victim or any other children.

"I have been a parishioner of St. Martha since 2005 and have known Father Nilo since the day he walked into our parish," said Kevin Shea of Point Pleasant, a parishioner and former newspaper reporter. "I have worked with him on parish ministries and nothing in his words or deeds would have ever led me to believe that Father Nilo would be accused of the allegations I learned about today. This is a stunner.

"Father Nilo has brought a greater sense of community to our parish and, in my opinion, has been nothing but a positive influence for St. Martha's. The words 'innocent until proven guilty' come to mind very strongly right now,"

Shea said.

The Diocese of Trenton reported the allegations to the Prosecutor's Office earlier this week and an investigation ensued.

### Top Archdiocese priest steps down

Apura has been pastor at St. Martha Parish since July of 2012, and formerly served in the parishes of St. Joachim, Trenton; St. Agnes, Atlantic Highlands; St. Maximilian Kolbe of Holiday City at Berkeley; Our Lady of Good Counsel, Moorestown; St. Ann Parish, Keansburg; and St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral, Trenton.

Bishop David M. O'Connell has suspended Apura pending the outcome of the investigation by law enforcement and recommendations from the Diocesan Review Board. The suspension prohibits Apura from celebrating Mass publicly, wearing priestly garb, or presenting himself as a priest, according to the Diocese.

On Aug. 18, the diocese received an allegation of sexual abuse committed by Apura against a 16-year-old. The complaint was based on abuse alleged to have taken place in Trenton, according to the Diocese statement.

It is the only complaint that the Diocese has received about Apura, and it has no connection to St. Martha Parish in Point Pleasant, where he has been serving as pastor, according to the statement.

The complaint was turned over to the Mercer County

Prosecutor's Office. An investigation was initiated, resulting in Apura's arrest today by law enforcement officers, according to the statement.

EDITORIAL: Archbishop Myers should pay price, too

David Clohessy, the director of the national group SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) said the diocese statement fell short. SNAP is the nation's largest and oldest self help group for clergy molestation victims.

"We believe the bishop should personally go, starting this weekend, to every church where this priest worked begging victims and whistle-blowers to call the police. Outreach via press release is inadequate. We also strongly urge anyone, everyone, who may have seen, suspected or suffered this cleric's crimes to find the strength to call law enforcement, protect the kids, expose wrongdoers and start healing," Clohessy said.

"We hope that the claims by Trenton Catholic officials are true. They say there is only one allegation. We are skeptical, and we believe it is disingenuous and self-serving for church officials to say that there is no connection with his current parish. It is obviously premature to make such assertions," Clohessy added.

"Catholic officials, even now, work hard to distance selves from predator priests and crimes when, in fact, they should be working harder to solve those crimes and focus more on the safety of vulnerable children and less on the protection of the reputations of priests and other church

officials," he said.

The diocese did not respond Thursday night for comment whether O'Connell would be visiting churches or how parishioners would be notified.

Anyone with information on the case should contact the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit at 609-989-6568. There is no scheduled court date at this time.

### **Previous incident within diocese**

The allegation of clergy abuse is not the first incident reported in the Diocese of Trenton.

In November 2013, Michael Fugee agreed to seek laicization from the Roman Catholic Church as part of settling charges with the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office.

Fugee, who served adults and children at St. Mary's Church in Colts Neck, resigned from the Archdiocese of Newark in May. Prosecutors charged him with flouting a 2007 agreement that allowed him to return to ministry after being convicted on charges that he fondled a boy.

Bergen County Prosecutor John Molinelli slammed the archdiocese for not properly monitoring Fugee after he returned to the priesthood.

"It has not appeared that the Archdiocese made any significant effort to adhere to the terms" of the agreement,

Molinelli said in a statement. Molinelli said he and others "no longer have confidence" in the archdiocese's ability to honor its terms.

The crux of the agreement was that Fugee refrain from having unsupervised contact with minors. Despite this, Fugee became a fixture at St. Mary's in Colts Neck, church youth group, traveling with teenagers and hearing confessions. The archdiocese said it did not know Fugee was spending time at the church, which is in a neighboring diocese.

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confessions. The archdiocese said it did not know Fugee was spending time at the church, which is in a neighboring diocese.

Goodness said the archdiocese was "quite frankly stunned that the Prosecutor would even suggest, much less state outright, that the Archdiocese 'did not nor would ever obtain' laicization of Michael Fugee, since there is direct evidence as well as Grand Jury testimony by the Archbishop that he had begun setting the preliminary groundwork for laicization."

In the prior case, Fugee confessed to police that while wrestling with a teenage boy he "grabbed his crotch" and was sexually excited.

Fugee's lawyers said the confession was coerced, but a jury convicted him of aggravated criminal assault in 2003.

The conviction was thrown out after courts revised jury instructions tied to a procedural aspect of the case. Rather than retry Fugee, prosecutors entered into the agreement.

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