

Bishop Guillory issues formal statement on former Catholic priest Frank Paduch

In response to recent local media reports and inquiries, the Catholic Diocese of Beaumont released a statement today saying it knew of no allegations against a former priest of the diocese when he was accepted for ordination in the diocese. When complaints of sexual misconduct were received in the Diocese of Beaumont against Fr. Frank Paduch, an investigation was initiated that resulted initially in the removal of his priestly faculties and ultimately in his removal from the priesthood (a.k.a. “defrocked”).

In a formal statement, Bishop Curtis J. Guillory, S.V.D., D.D., Bishop of Beaumont, said, “We were not aware of the complaints of abuse that allegedly occurred in the 1980’s in Chicago until a lawsuit was filed there in 1997 against the Augustinian Order. That lawsuit was filed eight years after Fr. Paduch was ordained. When we received a complaint against him here in the Diocese of Beaumont in 2001, we initiated an investigation that eventually led to his removal. I also personally contacted the complainants and offered them pastoral assistance and counseling at the diocese’s expense.”

Since Fr. Paduch’s departure from the Diocese of Beaumont, no secular employer has ever contacted the diocese for a pre-employment reference check.

In June, 2002, The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for all dioceses of this country. It is a comprehensive set of procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy and also includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability, and prevention of future acts of abuse. Many of the concrete ways that the Diocese of Beaumont has implemented the Charter can be found on the diocesan website (www.dioceseofbmt.org) under the “Safe Environment” tab.

“Today, we all share responsibility for reporting suspicions to civil and church authorities. Every report made to us of the abuse of a minor is reported to civil authorities. Victims who come forward are treated with respect, given a listening ear, provided spiritual and pastoral assistance, and offered counseling. There is no priest in ministry in our diocese who has been credibly accused of abusing a minor. Again, I offer my apology to any person who has been abused by Catholic clergy or church personnel. The Church that our Lord and Savior established should be a safe place for all. My prayers are with all those who have suffered this kind of abuse,” said Bishop Guillory.

Bishop Guillory also stated, “While the Diocese of Beaumont has always wanted to know if any of its church personnel were acting inappropriately, in 2003 we began aggressively to search for victims of sexual abuse by ALL church personnel, not just Frank Paduch, by advertising in our Catholic newspaper and on our diocesan website. We are confident that any victim of abuse in our Diocese, no matter where they now live, can find our website and use it to inform us of the abuse and seek help from us. When we receive such information, we report it to proper authorities according to the requirements of civil and criminal law.”

For the sake of clarity and transparency, we are providing the following chronology:

- Brother Frank Paduch, OSA, came to the Diocese of Beaumont in Sept., 1987, on an approved leave of absence from the Augustinians. There were no indications from the Augustinians of any complaints or allegations against Bro. Paduch. He was initially assigned to St. Charles Church in Nederland, Texas.
- After receiving a dispensation from vows as an Augustinian Brother in January, 1989, Frank Paduch was accepted into the Diocese of Beaumont by Bishop Bernard Ganter and, with no negative indications, he was ordained to the priesthood in July, 1989. He was appointed to Our Lady of Victory parish in Sour Lake and assigned as Chaplain & religion teacher at Msgr. Kelly Catholic High School.
- In January, 1991, a signed complaint letter was sent to Bishop Ganter about Fr. Paduch’s alleged unbecoming behavior with students of our Catholic high school. The letter was given to the school Principal, who addressed the complaints with Fr. Paduch.
- In April, 1996, a second signed complaint letter from parents was sent to Bishop Joseph Galante, then Bishop of Beaumont, alleging verbal and emotional abusive treatment of their son by Fr. Paduch, also stating that he allegedly served alcohol in the rectory to their son and other high school students. With the disciplinary procedures in place at that time, Bishop Galante confronted Fr. Paduch, who subsequently resigned from our Catholic high school.
- In February, 1997, (after Fr. Paduch had resigned from the Catholic high school) the Augustinians in Chicago and Fr. Paduch were sued in Cook County, Illinois, for an alleged incident of sexual abuse of a High School freshman in 1980. The Augustinians immediately notified the Diocese of Beaumont, where Fr. Paduch was assigned. Fr. Paduch denied the allegations, and he was never served with a summons. The Augustinians settled out of court in April, 1999.
- In September, 1999, Fr. Paduch was appointed pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, Liberty, Texas.

- In August, 2001, a 25 yr. old man living outside of the diocese filed a complaint against Fr. Paduch for a single incident of inappropriate touching in 1993, when the man was a 16 yr. old student at our Catholic high school. Bishop Curtis Guillory, then Bishop of Beaumont, investigated according to the procedures in effect at that time and arranged to send Fr. Paduch for psychological evaluation and treatment. In October, 2001, Fr. Paduch decided instead to take a 3-yr. leave of absence from priestly ministry. Bishop Guillory revoked his priestly faculties and prohibited Fr. Paduch from functioning as a priest or wearing clerical attire. He later left Texas for the Chicago area, where he had family. Since Fr. Paduch's departure from this diocese, no secular employer has ever contacted the diocese for a pre-employment reference check.

- With the implementation of the USCCB Charter, Bishop Guillory wrote a letter to Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago, in September, 2003, notifying him that Frank Paduch was living in his Archdiocese in Berwyn, IL, and that there was a recent complaint of sexual abuse of a minor in 1993. Bishop Guillory conducted additional follow-up of the complaint of the 25 yr. old man, according to our post-Charter procedures. Assistance by the diocese's Victim Assistance Coordinator was offered, and provision for counseling at the diocese's expense was made to the complainant. The Bishop personally contacted the young man.

- In December, 2003, the Diocese of Beaumont received a second allegation against Fr. Paduch from a 26 yr. old man living in another State. The allegation was about incidents of inappropriate touching between 1990-1992 when the man was 14-16 yrs. old and a student at our Catholic high school. Assistance by the diocese's Victim Assistance Coordinator was offered, and provision for counseling at the diocese's expense was made to the complainant. The Bishop personally contacted the young man. Bishop Guillory initiated a canonical preliminary investigation and followed the Charter procedures.

- In March, 2004, Bishop Guillory wrote Frank Paduch to notify him of the two allegations that were to be reviewed by the Diocesan Review Board, in accord with the Charter. [The Diocesan Review Board is a consultative body, consisting mainly of lay men and women, to assist the Bishop in discharging his responsibilities of assessing allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by church personnel and determining suitability for ministry or service.] The Review Board reviewed the complaints and made their recommendations to the Bishop. Frank Paduch also wrote a letter requesting laicization. In accord with the Charter and the directives of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the acts of the case and Frank Paduch's letter were transmitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in May, 2004.

- In January, 2005, Bishop Guillory received confirmation from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that Frank Paduch had been laicized (a.k.a. "defrocked"). Letters of notification were sent by Bishop Guillory to the two former Catholic high school students to inform them of this end result, as well as Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, and the Major Superior of the Augustinians in Illinois.

Since 1996, the Diocese of Beaumont has actively initiated programs to prevent abuse and encourage reporting of suspicious incidents. In 1996, the Diocese implemented its "Ethical and Responsible Conduct Policies" throughout the diocese and began training of clergy, employees, and volunteers using the video, "Understanding the Sexual Boundaries of the Pastoral Relationship." Follow-up training was done at Clergy Days, and abuse awareness and safe environment materials were regularly distributed over the years.

Since September, 2003, the Diocese of Beaumont has been audited each year by the Gavin Group, an independent auditing group comprised of mostly former FBI investigators. Each year, the Diocese was deemed "in full compliance with the USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." On "Bishop's Corner" on the diocesan website, www.dioceseofbmt.org, one can find Bishop Guillory's press releases about the outcome of audits, his March 15, 2002 Pastoral Statement, "Models of Right Conduct," as well as his December 12, 2003 report of the John Jay Survey statistics of the Diocese of Beaumont from 1966 – 2002. Also on the diocesan website, under the "Safe Environment" tab, one will find the diocese's history of awareness training sessions of adults, children, and parents, the diocese's background checks policies, victim assistance and outreach, the diocesan "Ethical and Responsible Conduct Policies", the Diocesan Review Board, and other safety measures that have been implemented.

Up to the end of June 2009, 224 "Protecting God's Children" training sessions for adults have been conducted throughout the diocese since the program was initiated in Oct., 2003. At least 4,886 adults have been trained in these sessions. Also, each year, thousands of students in our Catholic schools and in our parish religious education programs receive safe environment training.

It is clear that the practices and procedures of the Diocese of Beaumont in 2010 are measurably different than before 2002, when the USCCB Charter was first implemented. The Diocese has regularly published on its website and in the diocesan newspaper, the East Texas Catholic, articles on sexual abuse awareness and safe environment issues. Since Oct., 2003, the East Texas Catholic has regularly published an ad inviting survivors of sexual abuse by clergy or church personnel to contact diocesan authorities and/or Child Protective Services. Also since 2003, this standing invitation and information on victim outreach has remained on the diocesan website.

The Catholic Diocese of Beaumont is committed to the safety of children and young people, the well-being of the community, and the integrity of the Church's ministry. We endeavor to make our parishes, schools, pastoral centers, offices, and all of our ministries safe environments for everyone, especially our children and young people.