



October 25, 2013

Dear Parishioners of St. Joseph Parish,

It is with great personal sadness that I must inform you that earlier today it was necessary to temporarily remove Msgr. Cole from the parish because of an allegation that he sexually abused a minor in the late 1970s, when he was assigned as an associate pastor at St. Mary Parish in South Amboy.

This action was necessary according to Church law, which requires that a priest be removed from ministry as a precautionary measure when an allegation of sexual abuse has been deemed to have a semblance of truth. Msgr. Cole steadfastly denies the charges against him.

This allegation was brought to my attention by the Office of the Middlesex County Prosecutor. The Prosecutor's office did not pursue the charges because the statute of limitations had expired. A retired investigator from the Prosecutor's office thoroughly investigated the allegation on behalf of the Diocese. The case was also examined by our Diocesan Review Board, which interviewed Msgr. Cole and the alleged victim. (The Review Board is composed of persons with expertise and experience in these matters, the majority of whom are laypersons not associated with the Diocese in any formal way.) Both the investigator and the Review Board reported to me that they found the information and circumstances surrounding the allegation were not frivolous. I accept their conclusions.

Church law requires that I now forward the case to the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is likely the matter will be resolved by means of a canonical trial. In the meantime, Msgr. Cole is considered innocent until proven guilty and will receive financial support from the Diocese.

These are the facts. I wish to conclude by speaking to you as your Shepherd. Until now, I was aware of nothing in Msgr. Cole's past suggestive of inappropriate behavior. Indeed, I know that Msgr. Cole, your deacons, and you yourselves have created a community with faith in the presence and power of Jesus Christ that will be your strength in the challenging days ahead.

Finally, I ask that you extend the kindness and hospitality for which St. Joseph Parish is known to the priests who will serve you in the near future.

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Let us be earnest in our prayers for Msgr. Cole at this most difficult time in his priesthood, for all who are victims of mistreatment by those who represent the Church, and for all the Church's efforts to eradicate the terrible scourge of sexual abuse from the Body of Christ.

Sincerely in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul G. Bootkoski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Paul G. Bootkoski
Bishop of Metuchen