



Statement of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

(Note: A lawsuit was filed Feb. 11 in Leon County Circuit Court seeking unspecified damages from the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee in a case involving Father Vijaya Bhaskar Godugunuru.)

Regarding the case involving Father Vijaya Bhaskar Godugunuru
February 15, 2008

On June 26, 2006, the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee learned that an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor had been made against Father Bhaskar, who arrived in the U.S. June 3, 2006. Father Bhaskar, a priest of the Diocese of Cuddapah in India, was visiting friends in Bonifay, Florida, and was allowed to assist at Blessed Trinity Parish. On July 13, 2006, Father Bhaskar was arrested by the Holmes County Sheriff's Department on a charge of second degree felony of lewd and lascivious battery against a minor. Prior to Father Bhaskar's visit to the diocese, reference checks were performed and showed no history of inappropriate behavior.

When the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee received information of the alleged abuse on June 26, 2006, it followed the directives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and informed Father Bhaskar that he was prohibited from exercising any ministry within the diocese. The Diocese confirmed that the matter was reported to the Holmes County Sheriff's Department. The Diocese also reported the matter to the Florida Department of Children and Families Abuse Registry.

As soon as the Diocese received information of the allegation of abuse, it reached out to those involved to provide counseling and other assistance, which was accepted.

The Diocese continues to offer counseling and other assistance to anyone who comes forward with a credible allegation of abuse, and remains committed to protecting the safety and well-being of all who seek ministry and pastoral care from representatives of the church. Anyone who knows of any instance of abuse is encouraged to report it to local law enforcement; to the Florida Department of Children and Families Abuse Registry at 800-962-2873; by calling Danielle Malone, Victim Assistance Coordinator for the diocese, at 850-435-3131, ext. 17, or by calling 850-435-3520 and asking for the director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection.