



July 14, 2006

Statement of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee regarding Father Vijaya Bhaskar

On July 13th Father Vijaya Bhaskar of the Diocese of Cuddapah in India, who was visiting friends in Bonifay, Florida, and assisting at Blessed Trinity parish there, was arrested by the Holmes County Sheriff's Department on a charge of second degree felony of lewd and lascivious battery against a minor.

On June 26, the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee learned that an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor had been made against Father Bhaskar, who arrived in this country on June 3, 2006. Prior to his visit to the diocese, reference checks were performed and showed no history of inappropriate behavior.

When the Diocese received information of the alleged abuse, 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 and it was accepted by the Florida Department of Children and Families Abuse Registry. The diocese pledges full cooperation with authorities in this ongoing investigation.

The Diocese extends its pastoral concern for any victims of crime perpetrated by church personnel and for any harm they may have experienced, and remains committed to protecting the safety and well-being of all who seek ministry and pastoral care from representatives of the Church.