



MONSIGNOR CHARLES V. ANTONICELLI MODERATOR OF THE CURIA

Dear Brother Priest,

As part of the Archdiocese of Washington's steadfast commitment to the protection of youth and the healing of those harmed by abuse, it is important that we inform you about a child-protection matter.

As you know, the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap.), for many years has overseen the pastoral ministry and governance of the community at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Washington. On Friday, October 26, 2018, the archdiocese learned for the first time by the Provincial of the Order that it had received an allegation of sexual abuse against Father Urbano Vazquez, OFM, Cap. The allegation was also reported to the D.C. Metropolitan Police. Father Vazquez has served as parochial vicar at Sacred Heart since 2014. Upon learning of the allegation, the archdiocese immediately removed Father Vazquez from ministry and suspended his priestly faculties. Since the initial claim to police, additional allegations against Father Vazquez were reported.

Compounding the seriousness of this matter, Father Moises Villalta, OFM Cap., pastor of Sacred Heart and Ms. Marlene Aquino, who served as Sacred Heart's coordinator of child protection, both failed to follow appropriate protocols related to reporting claims of abuse to civil authorities and the Archdiocese of Washington. Father Villalta has been removed as pastor; Ms. Aquino has been placed on administrative leave.

The archdiocese follows a zero-tolerance policy for child protection matters, and the actions taken in this case are in line with such a policy. The archdiocese is fully cooperating in this investigation and encourages anyone with information that may be helpful to the authorities to contact Detective Eric Walsh, Youth and Family Services Division, Physical and Sexual Abuse Unit of the Metropolitan Police Department at 202-568-1971.

You may be asked about this matter as we expect extensive media coverage. Should you be asked, please also consider sharing that the Archdiocese of Washington takes seriously its responsibility to protect the children entrusted to its care. The Child Protection Policy of the Archdiocese of Washington mandates criminal background checks and child safety training for all employees and volunteers who work with young people. In this case, Father Vazquez cleared the background check and accompanying requirements.

If at any time you become aware of improper conduct by a person involved in archdiocesan ministry, please contact Courtney Chase, Executive Director of the archdiocese's Office of Child Protection and Safe Environment at 301-853-5302.

I ask that you please keep in your prayers those who are affected by this very painful situation and all who have been harmed by abuse. We continue to pray for God's healing presence that our young people always be safe from harm.

Sincerely in Christ,

Reverend Monsignor Charles V. Antonicelli
Moderator of the Curia