

For Immediate Release
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South Portland Pastor Resigns

Based on the conclusions of a diocesan investigation, the Rev. Paul E. Coughlin, 69, of St. John and Holy Cross Parishes, South Portland has tendered his resignation at the request of Bishop Richard J. Malone. His resignation is being announced to his parishes this weekend and is effective immediately. The Bishop is also restricting Fr. Coughlin from exercising any public ministry due to ethical violations. After a suitable period of time, the Bishop will revisit that decision. Exceptions to these restrictions will be considered in circumstances regarding ministry by Fr. Coughlin to members of his own family.

Fr. Coughlin was temporarily removed from ministry in August (2004) in order for the diocese to investigate his association with John S. Skinner, Sr. who had been indicted for sexually assaulting a teenager. Skinner has admitted to abusing young people from the late 1970's to 2003 and is now serving a prison term.

The diocesan investigation found that Fr. Coughlin failed to follow a 1987 diocesan policy when he failed to report that he had received information in 1989 from a minor who had been sexually abused by Skinner, and further, that he failed to take steps to provide assistance to that victim.

The investigation also found that with knowledge of Skinner's actions, Fr. Coughlin allowed him to live at the St. John rectory from 1999-2001 with no precautions or notifications. That decision provided Skinner with access to minors, when Skinner attended a youth ministry convention claiming to be a representative of St. John and Holy Cross parishes. While living at the rectory and with Fr. Coughlin's knowledge, Skinner achieved certification in youth ministry by using the name of the parish. Skinner also expressed an interest in the position of youth minister at the parish but was not offered the job. The diocese could find no evidence that minors were abused by Skinner in South Portland or at the Youth Convention.

The diocese also reviewed the complaint brought forward two years ago against Fr. Coughlin which alleged sexual misconduct with a minor in 1985. Public authorities were aware of this complaint and no criminal charges were filed. Although no new evidence specifically regarding the 2002 complaint was found, it is now reasonable to believe that there was inappropriate physical contact at that time. None of Fr. Coughlin's actions constituted a criminal offense nor did those actions invoke the provisions of the Dallas Charter. Both the 2002 and 2004 investigations have been turned over to the Attorney General's office for their review.

Msgr. Michael Henchal remains administrator of St. John and Holy Cross parishes until a new pastor is named. The diocesan Crisis Response Team will conduct listening sessions at Holy Cross and St. John parishes after each of the Masses this weekend to offer support to parishioners.

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Press Advisory: Sue Bernard will be available to answer media questions Sunday, Oct. 24th at 11:30 a.m. in the parking lot of Holy Cross Parish (corner of North Richland and Cottage Roads, South Portland)

Cameras are not allowed in church or on church property. Reporters may attend Mass, however approaching or interviewing parishioners is NOT allowed in the church or on church property. Also, out of respect for parishioners, the media is not invited to the private listening sessions.

Additional information: Fr. Coughlin is originally from Woburn, Massachusetts. He studied at Maryknoll College, Illinois and Maryknoll Seminary, New York. He was ordained in 1966 and has served as faculty and staff at Maryknoll Junior Seminary in California. His first assignment in Maine was at St. Athanasius and St. John, Rumford in 1970. He also served as Chaplain at Mt. Merici Convent and School, Waterville and Colby College (1971), St. Theresa Parish, Oakland (1973), St. Mary Parish, Augusta (1974), St. Mary Parish, Bangor (1978), and St. Mary Parish, Wells (1987.)