

Former St. Leo pastor admits to abuse

Parishioners of St. Leo in Little Italy were informed Dec. 28 that Michael Salerno, their former Pallottine pastor, admitted to the sexual abuse of a minor in the 1970s and that his faculties to function as a priest have been permanently revoked.

In a letter to parishioners dated Dec. 28, Father Peter T. Sticco, provincial for the Pallottines of the Immaculate Conception Province, who staff St. Leo, said Mr. Salerno admitted to the sexual abuse during an investigation conducted by the Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y., where he had served as a Pallottine brother.

"I regret that the investigation took so long to complete, since I know it has been a painful process for many, especially those in the St. Leo's community," wrote Father Sticco.

He said the final report confirmed that "Michael Salerno did sexually abuse a boy who was approximately 13 years old at the time of the initial abuse. Michael Salerno admitted to the investigators that he sexually abused the person in question a number of times over a period of years in the mid- to late 1970s."

According to the letter, no other individuals have come forward claiming they were abused as children.

Anyone who has knowledge of child sexual abuse is urged to come forward and to report it immediately to civil authorities. If clergy or other church personnel are suspected of committing the abuse, they are asked to call 973-762-2926. The Archdiocese of Baltimore's Office of Child and Youth Protection hotline is 1-866-417-7469.

Mr. Salerno "will never again function as a Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Baltimore or any other diocese" and will remain under the care of the Pallottines, according to Father Sticco.

"This has also been a difficult process for both the victim and for Michael Salerno,"

Father Sticco wrote. "I ask you to pray for both individuals, who are each struggling spiritually and emotionally."

Parishioners have been encouraged to turn to Pallottine Father Salvatore C. Furnari, the current administrator pastor of the parish, for spiritual support.