

Archdiocese of Detroit

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VATICAN ACTION ON TWO DETROIT PRIEST CASES PASTOR REMOVED; PRIEST LAICIZED

The Vatican has supported Cardinal Adam Maida, archbishop of Detroit, in a case involving a local priest who refused to resign his pastorate subsequent to allegations of abuse of minors. Father James Wysocki, 63, who served as pastor of Holy Cross Parish, Marine City, was placed on administrative leave and restricted from any public ministry effective February 1st, 2003. The Archdiocesan Review Board had deemed substantive allegations of sexual abuse of minors involving Fr. Wysocki dating back to the early years of his ministry. Last year, Cardinal Maida requested Fr. Wysocki resign as pastor. Fr. Wysocki declined and appealed the cardinal's decision to the Vatican.

Recently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith informed the cardinal that all the proper procedures were observed, that Father Wysocki's appeal was rejected, and the original decree of removal prevailed. In addition, the Congregation determined that a trial, according to the norms of canon law, should be conducted to address the allegations made against Fr. Wysocki.

Father Timothy Birney, who has been serving as administrator, has been named pastor of Holy Cross Parish; he was formally installed on Sunday, January 11th. In a letter to Holy Cross parishioners, Cardinal Maida asks for "... continued prayers for the Church, for Fr. Wysocki and for Fr. Birney." With this matter resolved, the cardinal writes, "It is my hope and prayer... Holy Cross Parish will continue to move forward in our common service of the Lord and His people."

In a separate communication this weekend, Cardinal Maida notified the priests of the archdiocese that Pope John Paul II has issued a decree of dismissal from the clerical state and dispensation from its obligations to Joseph Sito, effective immediately. The process by which a priest is returned to the lay state is also known as laicization (*lay-eh-suh-za-shun*).

Sito, 68, was placed on administrative leave in May 1993, while serving as pastor of St. Cletus Parish, Warren, due to substantive allegations of sexual abuse of minors. Additional restrictions were placed on him in the spring of 2002. A laicized (*lay-eh-sized*) priest is barred from priestly ministry, dispensed from the promise of celibacy and all other priestly obligations.

Pictures of Father Wysocki and Joseph Sito (circa 1983) are can be found on the Internet at homepage.mac.com/nedmcgrath. Additional information on the archdiocesan response to clergy sex abuse is available at AODonline.org, select *News & Publications*.

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