

Press Release 12-14-06

Today Bishop Vann removed Fr. Gil Pansza from Ministry

Editor's note: *Bishop Kevin Vann issued the following statement to a news conference, Thursday afternoon, Dec. 14 at The Catholic Center in West Fort Worth. The floor was then opened to questions put forward by reporters from area television and radio stations and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.*

It is my sad duty to announce that I have removed Father Gilbert Pansza, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Wichita Falls, from active ministry in accord with the terms of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

In continuing to review the files of the diocese, we discovered an admission from Fr. Pansza of sexual abuse of a minor that occurred in the early 1970s. The behavior to which Fr. Pansza admitted, as I said, occurred in the early 1970s before he was even a seminarian. We have turned the information about the incident over to the appropriate legal authorities.

Since his ordination to the priesthood in 2000, we have not received any accusations of abuse of minors against Fr. Pansza.

We are taking this action on the basis of our discovery of this information in the files. We have removed Fr. Pansza from active ministry because it is the right thing to do in protecting God's people from any potential harm.

I have asked Father James Hart, in his capacity as chancellor, and Father Michael Olson, vicar general and overseer of the Conduct Review Board, to review all priest personnel files.

As I have said, this is a sad time both for me personally and in the history of our local Church. It is distressing to remove a priest, but this needed to be done.

I once again recommit myself to the Church of Fort Worth and to all of you, to act in accord with the best interests and the safety of the vulnerable among us, and to be in accord with the requirements of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

I want to again state that if anyone has been abused or knows of anyone who has been abused by a priest or any employee or volunteer of the church, please contact Ms. Judy Locke, Victims Assistance Coordinator at (817) 560-3300 or Father Michael Olson at the same number.