News

A Latino man with short hair and a clerical collars looks into the camera with a slight smile

Fr. Juan Carlos Garcia, pictured in a file photo, has been removed from his position as associate pastor at St. Philip Catholic Church in Franklin, Tenn., and from public ministry while an investigation into reports of sexual misconduct is under way by the Franklin City Police Department, according to a Jan. 6, 2024, statement from the Diocese of Nashville. (OSV News photo/Diocese of Nashville)



by OSV News

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The Nashville Diocese said Jan. 6 that the associate pastor at a Franklin Catholic parish, Fr. Juan Carlos Garcia, has been removed from his parish post and from public ministry while the Franklin City Police Department investigates reports of sexual misconduct allegedly involving the priest.

According to Detective Andrea Clark, with the department's Special Victims Unit, the case will be sent to the Williamson County District Attorney for review.

Ordained to the priesthood in 2020, Garcia was assigned to St. Philip Parish in Franklin in July 2022. Before that, he was the associate pastor at St. Rose of Lima in Murfreesboro from the time of his ordination until he was assigned to St. Philip.

In early November, St. Philip officials reported to the Diocese of Nashville's Safe Environment Office that a teen in the parish had made a report of improper touching involving Garcia.

Per diocesan protocols, a report was immediately made by the diocese and representatives of St. Philip to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services.

Following its Safe Environment Policy, the diocese retained an outside investigator, who is a former FBI agent, to investigate the report.

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"The Diocesan Review Board was promptly convened to evaluate the information available from the investigation and to advise" Nashville Bishop J. Mark Spalding, the diocesan statement said. "Pursuant to the Review Board recommendation, Father Garcia was removed from active ministry. Further, the investigative report and all available information were provided to the Franklin Police Department on the Diocese's own initiative."

"That investigation is continuing with the full cooperation of the Diocese and its representatives, mindful of the due process accorded to all parties," the statement said.

"Any person who reasonably suspects that child sexual abuse has occurred is required by law to make a report to civil authorities," the diocese said. "If the suspicion of abuse involves either an employee or volunteer in a ministry or a parish, a report should also be made to the Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator."

The diocese urged "anyone with information regarding Father Garcia" to contact Clark at (615) 476-2809.

"The Diocese provides victim assistance to those who may have suffered abuse by someone in the ministries of the diocese or a parish, no matter how long ago that abuse occurred," the statement said, directing people to its website for information about reporting abuse and about the victim assistance program, https://dioceseofnashville.com/safe-environment/contact-information.