News



Msgr. Kieran Harrington, then national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies USA, delivers the homily during the St. Patrick's Day Mass March 17, 2023, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. The Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, announced Feb. 13, 2024, that Harrington resigned his post as national director after an allegation against him of "inappropriate conduct with an adult" was substantiated. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

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Msgr. Kieran Harrington, a priest of the Brooklyn Diocese, has resigned from his post as the national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States after an allegation against him of "inappropriate conduct with an adult" was substantiated, the Diocese of Brooklyn announced.

As a result of the substantiation of the allegation, Harrington also has been placed on a leave of absence from his priestly ministry "pending an evaluation to determine his suitability to serve the Church in the future," according to the diocese.

The allegation of inappropriate conduct against Harrington was received by the diocese March 6, 2023. An investigation was conducted, and the findings were presented to the Diocese of Brooklyn Adult Allegation Committee, or AAC, which substantiated the allegation, according to a diocese statement.

"The AAC, comprised of professionals in the fields of law enforcement, human resources, law, and psychology, found sufficient proof of inappropriate behavior with an adult — a violation of the code of conduct and Priestly Holy Orders," the diocese statement reads. "As a result of this finding, Msgr. Harrington submitted his resignation to the Pontifical Mission Societies."

Announcing his resignation, Harrington said he "regrettably," had a "single, inappropriate, consensual encounter with an adult woman," adding that he was "wrong to have done so."

Harrington also said he is not the subject of any complaint or civil proceeding.

"The fact came to light during an ecclesiastical proceeding unrelated to me or to my tenure at The Pontifical Mission Societies," Harrington explained in a statement. "As is procedure, the Diocese of Brooklyn conducted an investigation into the matter."

"I cooperated and was forthcoming about the events. The report concluded that the encounter was consensual," he said. "Nevertheless, I had broken my promise of

celibacy."

However, responding to Harrington's statement, the diocese disagreed with his characterization that the report concluded that the encounter was "consensual," saying that "the board did not make a finding on the issue of consent."

"The board concluded that this behavior violated the Code of Conduct and he should have known better," the diocese added.

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In response to the diocese, Harrington said he "stands by" his statement.

A spokesperson for the Pontifical Mission Societies USA thanked Harrington for his ministry leading the organization.

"We thank Msgr. Harrington for his service and dedication to the Church's mission," the statement reads. "Under his tenure, TPMS has taken specific steps to increase levels of transparency, accountability, and oversight."

Harrington was appointed to his post as national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in April 2021 by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. It was a five-year appointment. The congregation, now called a dicastery, oversees the work of more than 120 national mission societies around the world.

With Harrington's resignation, the Pontifical Mission Societies USA board of directors has asked Fr. Anthony Andreassi to serve as interim national director, according to the spokesperson.

Under the direction of the pope, the Pontifical Mission Societies purpose is to promote a universal missionary spirit among all baptized Catholics There are four societies: the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Association of the Holy Childhood, the Society of St. Peter the Apostle, and the Missionary Union of Priests and Religious.

Each society received the title "pontifical" in 1922 to indicate their status as official instruments of the pope and of the universal Catholic Church. The national director heads the four societies in the United States and oversees the World Mission Sunday

Collection, which is taken up on the next-to-last Sunday of October each year.

Harrington said he is proud of his work with the Pontifical Mission Societies, especially the steps he and the team have taken to improve transparency, accountability and oversight, including "reforms in our governance, systems and processes."

"The work of The Pontifical Mission Societies is more vital than ever before, facilitating life-changing encounters with Christ, who calls us to serve others. It is not my intention to distract from this great cause," Harrington said.

Prior to his role with the Pontifical Mission, Harrington served as vicar for communications in the Diocese of Brooklyn from 2006-2021. In 2011, he created DeSales Media Group — the communications and technology ministry that operates as a nonprofit within the diocese — and he served as its president and chairman. DeSales Media owns The Tablet and Currents News.

Harrington also was the rector of the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Prospect Heights. He completed the restoration of the structure.

Between Harrington's ministry in the Diocese of Brooklyn and with the Pontifical Mission Societies, he has been a priest for 22 years.

"I pray to see what God may ask for me next," Harrington said. "I'm sorry to have disappointed my colleagues, friends and parishioners. Without any right, I continue to ask and rely on their prayers."