

Miami priest joins Episcopal church

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(CNS photo)

A Catholic priest photographed frolicking with a woman on a Florida beach announced Thursday he had joined the Episcopal Church to pursue the priesthood in a faith that allows married clergy.

The charismatic 40-year-old is a well-known religious leader in Miami who dispensed relationship advice on Spanish-language television shows, church radio programs and newspaper columns.

He was relieved of his duties at St. Francis de Sales parish in Miami Beach earlier this month after an entertainment magazine published photos of him in swim trunks, snuggling and kissing a woman on the sands of a beach in Florida.

Cutie later said he had fallen in love with the woman and broken his vow of celibacy. He apologized for his behavior, but told a television network, "I didn't stop being a man just because I put on a cassock. There are trousers under this cassock."

The woman in the photographs, identified in media reports as Ruhama Canellis, stood at Cutie's side as he held a news conference at Trinity Cathedral, where the couple underwent a ceremony to join the Episcopalians.

The Episcopal church ordains men and women as priests, married or single.

At his news conference, Cutie said he saw his move as "going into a new family" and said he would continue to proclaim God's word. "I will always love the Catholic Church and all its members who are committed in their faith and have enriched my life in so many ways," he said.

In a statement shortly after the photos were published, Archbishop Favalora said he was "deeply saddened by the news" and apologized "on behalf of the church in Miami" to the parishioners of St. Francis de Sales, "to the listeners and supporters of Radio Paz and Radio Peace and to the entire archdiocese."

In a personal apology on his web site Cutie had asked for forgiveness from those "who may be hurt or saddened by my actions."

He said that since he entered the seminary at age 18 the priesthood has brought him great joy.

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