

## Outspoken Wis. priest's retirement not a punishment

Dennis Coday | May. 8, 2013 NCR Today

The retirement of Fr. James Connell, a priest of the Milwaukee archdiocese has been in the pipeline since last fall, the priest told *NCR* Wednesday morning, hoping to quash rumors that he was being reprimanded for outspokenness in his defense of victims of clergy sex abuse.

The retirement is not related to the [letters Connell sent to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) [1] in April calling for an investigation into Newark, N.J., Archbishop John J. Myers and his handling of a priest accused of the sexual abuse of a minor, Connell told *NCR* in an email message.

[An announcement](#) [2] of Connell's retired appeared on the website of his Sheboygan, Wis., parish this week. Connell will step down as pastor of St. Holy Name of Jesus & Saint Clement Parishes June 18 when the new pastor Fr. Matthew Widder will be installed.

"Last October I celebrated my 70th birthday," Connell wrote in his email message. "At that time I requested to retire from full-time assigned ministry beginning June 30, 2013. Archbishop Jerome ListECKI granted my request. So, the assignment of my replacement is in order and was expected."

In late April as news broke from [New Jersey that a Newark priest who has a court-ordered lifetime ban on ministry to children](#) [1] was attending youth retreats and heard confessions of minors, Connell wrote two letters to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which deals with the abuse crisis, seeking clarification on Myers handling of the priest at the center of the allegations, Fr. Michael Fugee.

At the time, Connell had said, "The truth in this crisis has to come to light or we will never have true justice. We cannot expect there to be healing for the victims and survivors if we do not have that truth."

Connell, a canon lawyer and the former vice chancellor of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, has been an outspoken candidate on the need for transparency in dealing with cases of clergy accused of sexual abusing minors.

Connell spelled out his retirement plans in his email message to *NCR* Wednesday: "In retirement I plan to provide liturgical help out as needed, continue my efforts regarding the Catholic clergy sexual abuse crisis and scandal, and volunteer to help in our archdiocesan jail and prison ministry (something that I have been doing the past 6+ years). I will be living in Milwaukee."

Asked if he had received a response from the Vatican on his query about Myers and Fugee, Connell said, "No word from the Vatican."

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**Links:**

[1] <http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/newark-paper-calls-prelate-resign>

[2] <http://www.holynamesclement.org/>