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Archbishop levies church sanctions on two priests found guilty of abuse

by Joe Ruff by Catholic News Service

Omaha, Neb. — The archdiocese of Omaha has found two archdiocesan priests -- in separate cases -- guilty of sexual abuse of a minor and administered ecclesiastical penalties, dismissing one from the priesthood with Vatican authorization and removing the other from active ministry and sentencing him to a life of prayer and penance.

After extensive investigations that included reviews of evidence by officials at the Vatican and experts in canon law, Omaha Archbishop George Lucas found Fr. Alfred J. Salanitro, 54, and Fr. Franklin A. Dvorak, 69, guilty of abuse and levied the church penalties against the two men.

Salanitro is prohibited from all priestly functions and ministries and cannot serve as a priest in the Catholic church, Deacon Tim McNeil, chancellor, said in a news release.

In addition to prayer and penance, Dvorak is prohibited from publicly exercising his priestly ministry, although he remains in the clerical state, McNeil said. He cannot celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments. Dvorak also was instructed Nov. 22 not to wear clerical attire, or to present himself publicly as a priest, the chancellor said.

Salanitro and Dvorak can appeal the ecclesiastical penalties. No criminal charges were expected because the statute of limitations has run out in both cases, McNeil said.

The archdiocese has provided pastoral outreach to the victims, and Lucas sent letters about outcomes of the cases to the members of St. Bernadette Parish in Bellevue, where Salanitro last served, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Omaha, where Dvorak last served.

Lucas also met with and answered questions from St. Bernadette parishioners Nov. 25 and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parishioners Nov. 26.

Dvorak was ordained in 1970 and will reach the priest retirement age of 70 in February. His term as pastor at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton expired last summer.

Both cases were reported to law enforcement and investigated by the archbishop and the Archdiocesan Review Board, an 11-member volunteer board consisting of child care experts, law enforcement officials, attorneys, clergy and mental health professionals that advises the archbishop on the protection of young people. The board was created in 2002 in response to the U.S. bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

In both situations, the archbishop and the board found the evidence met the church's standard for a credible allegation. Results of the separate investigations were forwarded to the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which takes over cases from local bishops for investigation and has the sole authority for disciplining abusive priests.

The congregation reviewed the evidence in both cases and authorized Archbishop Lucas to resolve them through an administrative penal process. The process consists of two assessors who are experts in canon law assisting the archbishop in determining innocence or guilt and providing the accused opportunities through their own canon lawyers to review the evidence and defend themselves.

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After the administrative penal process was completed, Lucas received a mandate from the doctrinal congregation to dismiss Salanitro from the priesthood.

In Dvorak's case, the archdiocese received an allegation in April 2012 that he had sexually abused a female student from 1970 to 1972 when he was serving in Norfolk. Lucas placed Dvorak on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation.

The archdiocese began investigating an allegation against Salanitro in December 2011, when he was pastor at St. Bernadette. A Carter Lake, Iowa, man reported he was sexually abused by Salanitro from 1991 to 1994, beginning when he was 11 years old. At that time, Salanitro was associate pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Omaha.

Lucas placed Salanitro on administrative leave pending the archdiocese's investigation, which also identified two additional adult males who claimed Salanitro sexually abused them when they were teenagers.

[Joe Ruff is news editor of the *Catholic Voice*, newspaper of the archdiocese of Omaha, Neb.]

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