

NY priest accused of abuse cleared

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NEW YORK -- A Vatican congregation has cleared Msgr. Alan J. Placa, a Rockville Centre diocesan priest who worked closely with former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, of any wrongdoing related to sexual abuse accusations in 2002.

Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre said in a recent statement that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had instructed him "to restore Msgr. Placa to ministry and to do what we can to restore his good name."

The bishop and the 65-year-old priest agreed, however, "that Msgr. Placa will not be given a diocesan assignment," the statement said. "Msgr. Placa's status is that of a retired priest in good standing."

The Vatican congregation's ruling that Msgr. Placa was "not guilty of the allegation of sexual abuse of a minor which was made against him in June of 2002" confirmed an earlier decision by the tribunal of the Diocese of Albany, the home diocese of the complainant.

Calling the Vatican decision "final and definitive," the statement said Msgr. Placa "is now permitted to exercise priestly ministry freely in the Roman Catholic Church."

"We hope that everyone in the diocese will recognize that Msgr. Placa is a priest in good standing," Bishop Murphy said. "It is my hope and prayer that this decision will bring closure and healing."

"We also ask people of good will to join us in praying for those who were, in fact, victims of sexual abuse," he added. "Their suffering must never be forgotten."

Msgr. Placa, a former vice chancellor in the Rockville Centre Diocese, was placed on administrative leave in 2002 after two men accused him of abusing them 25 years earlier at St. Pius X Preparatory Seminary in Uniondale. At the time of the accusations, the priest was working for Giuliani Partners, a management consulting and security consulting business.

No criminal or civil charges were ever filed in the case against Msgr. Placa, who repeatedly denied the accusations.

Meanwhile, a former priest of the Cleveland Diocese was sentenced to 90 days in jail and three years' probation Dec. 14 after pleading guilty to corrupting a minor in 1997.

Patrick O'Connor, now 52, resigned from the priesthood in 2008 after a man alleged that O'Connor had sexual contact with him when the victim was 15 years old in 1997. O'Connor also had been on administrative leave from 2003 to 2007 while the diocese investigated other sex abuse allegations against him.

At his sentencing, O'Connor apologized to the victim, saying, "My actions were inexcusable and I betrayed a

sacred trust," according to a report in The Chronicle-Telegram newspaper in Elyria, Ohio.

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