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Connecticut priest barred from ministry faces federal drug charges

by Catholic News Service

Bridgeport, Conn. — The arrest of a former Connecticut pastor on federal drug charges was greeted "with a sense of shock and concern" by the Bridgeport Diocese and many Catholics in the diocese who know the priest "as a gifted, accomplished and compassionate priest."

The reaction came in a diocesan statement issued in regard to the case of Msgr. Kevin Wallin, 61, a former pastor in Bridgeport whose priestly faculties were removed last year.

A grand jury indicted the priest and four other people on drug charges Jan. 15. Federal agents arrested Wallin on Jan. 3. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The Associated Press reported he was charged for allegedly having methamphetamine mailed to him from co-conspirators in California and making more than \$300,000 in drugs sales out of his apartment in Waterbury in the second half of last year.

According to the Bridgeport Diocese, Wallin resigned as pastor of St. Augustine Cathedral Parish in Bridgeport in June 2011 after serving nine years there. "At the time, he told parishioners and friends that he was struggling with a number of health and personal issues. He was granted a sabbatical in July of 2011," the diocesan statement said.

"During his sabbatical, the diocese became concerned about Wallin's well-being and has reached out to him," the statement said, but the priest did not take up the offer of help. "To date, he has not spoken directly with diocesan officials."

His priestly faculties were suspended in May, and he has not been reassigned, according to the diocese.

"The diocese stands ready to help as it has throughout the past two years," the statement said. "We ask for prayers for Msgr. Wallin during the difficult days ahead for him."

As of Tuesday, the priest remained in custody without bail. Jury selection in his case has been set for March.

Connecticut U.S. Attorney David Fein told AP that since last July federal and state authorities had worked together in "the dismantling of what we allege was a significant methamphetamine distribution organization that spanned from California to Connecticut."

The AP and other news media also reported that during the last year or so, Wallin bought an adult video and sex-toy shop in North Haven. He also has been described as being a cross-dresser.

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The diocese said Tuesday that only when the priest resigned did it become aware of accusations he had a drug problem and sexual problems. The issues were "never part of his priesthood," the diocese said.

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