



CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* JACKSON

Catholic Diocese of Jackson Agrees to Resolve Investigation

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For Immediate Release

JACKSON, Miss. – The Catholic Diocese of Jackson has entered into an agreement with federal prosecutors to tighten financial controls and bring to a conclusion an investigation stemming from the actions of one of its former pastors.

Over the last year and a half, federal authorities have conducted an investigation into events at the parish in Starkville and its mission in Macon that involved then Father Lenin Vargas. That investigation included federal authorities executing search warrants at those sites and at the offices of the Diocese in Jackson.

“During the course of the investigation, the Diocese has worked to bring forth the truth that would lead to a just resolution and reconciliation throughout our Catholic community,” said Bishop Joseph Kopacz.

The Deferred Prosecution Agreement spells out a number of specific changes the Diocese is to undertake and maintain including:

- Return of donations related to alleged fraudulent activities against parishioners
- Undertake staff changes in the Accounting and Chancery Offices
- Improvements in accounting for donations and priest spending
- Formation of a new review board focusing on ethical conduct
- Establish a fraud prevention hotline
- Revise collection policies
- Initiate formal penal process for Vargas

The Diocese had proactively undertaken all of these measures during the course of the investigation, with the exception of initiation of a formal penal process for Vargas, which will begin now.

“There are still steps to be taken and certainly more changes ahead,” added Bishop Kopacz. “As part of an agreed upon resolution of the federal investigation, the Diocese will welcome periodic review and oversight of its financial and management practices and protocols. As a result of the many steps we have already taken to tighten our internal controls, we are very comfortable with this resolution.”

Bishop Kopacz expressed, “deep regret for all who have been hurt by Lenin Vargas’s actions. We still invite anyone to come forward with claims, and we will work to seek a just resolution with them. We hope in Christ for new life and peace.”

The Agreement is to be in effect for twelve months.

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