



## Concerning the Public Alert on Fr. Joseph A. Colletti

Patrick Odou

### 1. The present-day state of affairs

In recent months, a public alert regarding Fr. Joseph A. Colletti came to light, originating from the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana with the endorsement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Fr. Joseph Anthony Colletti has been saying the Traditional Latin Mass at Our Lady Help of Christians Chapel (OLHC) in Orange County, California, since December 2015. He is an elderly priest (age 74) and has been one of the four priests regularly saying Mass at that Chapel.

That alert was posted on the Internet. Its text was printed on paper and has circulated for some months – at least since April 2017 – among the parishioners at the OLHC. The sanctions imposed on Fr. Colletti revealed in that document raised serious suspicions that he incurred a conviction of pedophilia, as I will explain below.

This possibility raised great dissatisfaction among many parishioners, which in turn led to his “dismissal” from his priestly duties at OLHC. Indeed, on May 21, 2017, at several Masses the priests announced from the pulpit that Fr. Colletti had been

called back by the Archdiocese of Chicago and would not return to OLHC. Others said that he had to “attend to some personal matters” and his leave of absence would be indefinite.

Recently, however, secure and trustworthy sources informed TIA that Fr. Colletti actually has never left the area of Orange County and that he occasionally goes to Chicago to visit his brother and then returns, as was his habit before. At times he goes to San Diego to visit his parents. Besides these short trips, he continues to live very close to his former residence. He also continues to have contact with several parishioners of OLHC who visit his residence.

Recently, some of these parishioners – perhaps unaware of the alert by the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana – instigated a petition that called for the return of Fr. Colletti to his previous duties at OLHC.

Given that the matter addressed in that public alert is of a very serious nature, the possibility of having Fr. Colletti return to his functions is causing a wave of confusion, hearsay and gossip among parishioners.

Since, unfortunately, the competent channels at OLHC are avoiding dealing with this topic straightforwardly, friends from Our Lady Help of Christian Chapel have contacted TIA with their concerns and have asked our help to clarify the issue.

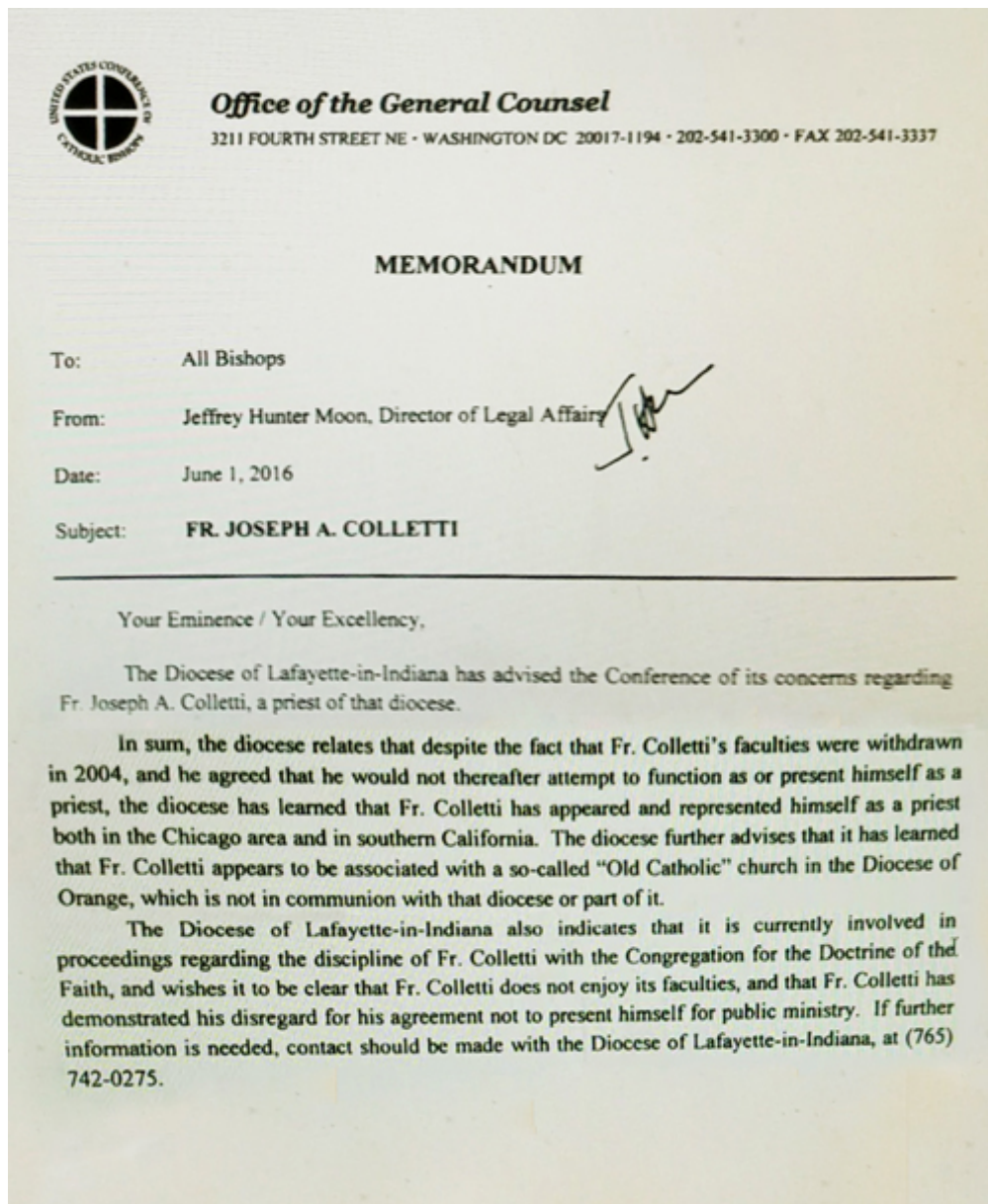
Because of my family’s long history of involvement with this Catholic chapel, Atila S. Guimarães, the editor of the TIA website, asked me to study the case and write an article to assist those friends. To offer them this help, and to honor my late beloved parents – Dr. Bruce and Mrs. Shirley Odou – who strongly supported Fr. Frederick Schell, S.J. in founding Our Lady Help of Christian Chapel, I took on this task. My intent is to clarify the situation, and to protect the families and children of the faithful who attend Mass at OLHC. I will first present the facts and, then, offer my interpretation of them.

## **2. The facts:**

### **A. The public alert by the USCCB**

The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana sent a warning to the USCCB regarding Fr. Joseph Colletti. The USCCB took up this warning as its own and sent it to all Dioceses of the U.S.

Below is a PDF of the USCCB document:



**B. The public alert by the Archdioceses of St. Louis and Cleveland**

The same document was reproduced by some other Dioceses, such as the

Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri, and the Archdiocese of Cleveland, Ohio.

With its content copying the memorandum almost verbatim, the text of the aforementioned alert published on the official website of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri follows:





Home Groups Office of the Vicar for Priests

### 6-1-2016 USCCB ALERT: Fr. Joseph Colletti

Posted on June 14, 2016 - 12:10pm



#### Office of the General Counsel

3211 FOURTH STREET NE - WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 - 202-541-3300 - FAX 202-541-3337

#### MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops

From: Jeffrey Hunter Moon, Director of Legal Affairs *JHM*

Date: June 1, 2016

Subject: **FR. JOSEPH A. COLLETTI**

Your Eminence / Your Excellency,

The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has advised the Conference of its concerns regarding Fr. Joseph A. Colletti, a priest of that diocese.

In sum, the diocese relates that despite the fact that Fr. Colletti's faculties were withdrawn in 2004, and he agreed that he would not thereafter attempt to function as or present himself as a priest, the diocese has learned that Fr. Colletti has appeared and represented himself as a priest both in the Chicago area and in southern California. The diocese further advises that it has learned that Fr. Colletti appears to be associated with a so-called "Old Catholic" church in the Diocese of Orange, which is not in communion with that diocese or part of it.

The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana also indicates that it is currently involved in proceedings regarding the discipline of Fr. Colletti with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and wishes it to be clear that Fr. Colletti does not enjoy its faculties, and that Fr. Colletti has demonstrated his disregard for his agreement not to present himself for public ministry. If further information is needed, contact should be made with the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana, at (765) 742-0275.

[6-1-16 USCCB ALERT Fr Joseph Colletti362.pdf](#)

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Priest Appointments - Effective August 17, 2015

For a larger copy click [here](#)

Also the Archdiocese of Cleveland, Ohio, reproduced the memorandum as shown in the page below:



**WARNINGS:  
USCCB- RE: FR.  
JOSEPH A.  
COLLETTI**

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In sum, the diocese relates that despite the fact that Fr. Colletti's faculties were withdrawn in 2004, and he agreed that he would not thereafter attempt to function as or present himself as a priest; the diocese has learned that Fr. Colletti has appeared and represented himself as a priest both in the Chicago area and southern California. The diocese further advises that it has learned that Fr. Colletti appears to be associated with a so-called "Old Catholic" church in the Diocese of Orange, which is not in communion with that diocese or part of it.

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## C. The Diocese of Orange

On August 16, 2017, I went to the Cathedral and Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Orange County hoping to discuss this matter with those in charge of the pedophilia crisis. The receptionist made a couple of calls and then connected me to Mr. Santiago Avila, an assistant of Fr. Daniel Reader. He confirmed via telephone that his director, Fr. Reader, was aware of that public alert.

He stated that the Fr. Joseph A. Colletti in the alert is the same man who was at Our Lady Help of Christians in Orange County.

Mr. Avila also stated that the Diocese of Orange considers Fr. Joseph Colletti "*persona non grata*." (Latin for "a person who is not welcome")

## D. The CDF oversees cases of pedophile priests

Why was the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - CDF – mentioned in that alert as the Vatican organ that issued the punishment for Fr. Colletti?

Someone could well ask this question: Since the normal Vatican Congregation to deal with problems of priests is the Congregation of the Clergy, why does that warning specifically mention the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith?

Here is the explanation.

One of the many crises caused by the Second Vatican Council is the current "pedophile priests crisis" that has rocked the Church from top to bottom. (For more on this subject go [here](#) and [here](#) on the TIA website or read the publication, [Vatican II, Homosexuality and Pedophilia](#) by Atila Sinke Guimarães.) The economic consequences alone have cost the Church billions of dollars. The cover-ups perpetrated by the Conciliar Catholic Hierarchy of the many grave sexual abuses finally exploded in the media in 2001 and continue to this day despite rhetorical apologies from Popes and Bishops.

The crisis reached such a heightened point that in April 2001, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then led by Card. Joseph Ratzinger (future Pope Benedict XVI) under Pope John Paul II, took over the cases of pedophilia from the Congregation of the Clergy, which normally deals with priests.

Customarily, all the problems related to priests fall under the authority of the

Congregation of the Clergy. However, given the great damage the cases of pedophilia were causing the Church and given that the Congregation of the Clergy had been accused of showing complaisance toward guilty priests, the CDF assumed those cases, made its own investigations and suspended the priests from their priestly duties when they were found guilty.

During his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI stated that more than 800 priests had been dismissed from their priestly duties because of pedophilia charges.

So, when the USCCB says that Fr. Colletti was suspended from his priestly duties by the CDF, it is understood that he was convicted of pedophilia.

This explains why the CDF was mentioned in that alert.

### **E. Confirmation of CDF's policy**

In order to confirm that this is the policy adopted by the CDF, I reproduce below how the website of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana reports the duties of the CDF.

#### **“More grave delicts against Morals” are reserved to the CDF**

The official website of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana, under the Child Protection Policy, [defines](#) that cases of sexual abuse of minors and child pornography **are reserved to** the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

*Below* is the text from the Diocese of Lafayette:



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The offense of sexual abuse of a minor will be understood in accord with the provisions of *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* (SST), article 6, as modified by the Circular Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith dated May 3, 2011, which provides that the more grave delicts against morals which are reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith are:

1° the delict against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a cleric with a minor below the age of eighteen years; in this case, a person who habitually lacks the use of reason is to be considered equivalent to a minor.

2° the acquisition, possession, or distribution by a cleric of pornographic images of minors under the age of eighteen, for purposes of sexual gratification, by whatever means or using whatever technology;

A cleric who commits the delicts mentioned above is to be punished according to the gravity of his crime, not excluding dismissal or deposition.

*The Diocesan Review Board*

For the full policy of the Diocese on child protection click [here](#)

## **F. The CDF does not make public the evidence for its convictions**

There are strong reasons for the CDF not to reveal the crimes of Bishops, priests or religious persons who are punished for the mentioned crimes of pedophilia. They are the following:

- a. The Church is an autonomous entity regarding the State. She has her own Law, tribunals and punishments, which are independent of the civil organs;
- b. Once she duly punishes her guilty members, she is acquitted of her duty of justice;
- c. She does not need to communicate the reasons for her punishments to the civil authorities unless the criminal also harms persons or institutions in the civil sphere;

- d. As an obligation of justice, she is committed to warn the ecclesiastical authorities when a prescribed punishment is not respected, which is what she did in the case of Fr. Colletti;
- e. Further, the Church has been asked to pay billions of dollars to victims of pedophilia in civil lawsuits. Consequently, she is very cautious to offer public evidence about priests convicted of pedophilia because civil lawyers can use this evidence in civil lawsuits to demand more and more money from the Church.
- f. Therefore, the alert made against Fr. Colletti corresponds perfectly to the norms the Church habitually uses; the lack of presented evidence should not be interpreted that he was not convicted of pedophilia, but rather as following the normal procedure to alert the religious authorities and the public that he was suspended and his faculties officially removed.

## **G. The attribution of 'Old Catholics' to the faithful of OLHC**

I do not know all the contacts Fr. Colletti has made in Orange County, nor do I know of any group of "Old Catholics" with whom he is in contact.

As is known, the sect of the "Old Catholics" originated from the denial of the dogma of Papal Infallibility. Led by the liberal German theologian Döllinger, a group of people separated themselves from the Church and were declared heretics by Pius IX. They took the name "Old Catholic."

Unless Fr. Colletti has contacts with "Old Catholics" in Orange County who follow those errors, we should consider that this epithet was used by the USCCB to refer to the traditionalist Catholics who attend the Latin Mass at OLHC. If this is true, the alert has at least one point that is not objective.

## **3. Interpretation of the facts:**

Although the offense of Fr. Colletti and the reason for the loss of faculties is not specifically stated, it is strongly implied that it is another case of clerical sexual abuse of minors. Indeed, the following data suggest this conclusion:

- The USCCB alert sent from Jeffrey Hunter Moon, Director of Legal Affairs, states that "The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana also indicates that it is currently involved in proceedings regarding the discipline of Fr. Colletti with the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.”

- Thus, Fr. Colletti’s faculties were withdrawn in 2004 by the CDF – and not by the Congregation of the Clergy – because of the extraordinary powers given to CDF by John Paul II to contain the pedophilia crisis that was/is rocking the Catholic Church from top to bottom;
- The USCCB alert states that Fr. Colletti “agreed that he would not thereafter attempt to function as or present himself as a priest.”
- Normally speaking, in agreeing to not function or present himself as a priest thereafter, Fr. Colletti recognized himself as guilty of the accusations the CDF made against him.
- The USCCB alert also affirms that Fr. Colletti “has demonstrated his disregard for his agreement not to present himself for public ministry.”
- Thus, besides being guilty, Fr. Colletti rebelled against the CDF sentence and has not honored his word.

## Moral issue

There have been many acts of heroism and sacrifice by the faithful, both clergy and laymen, since Vatican II began wreaking havoc.

For example, the [late](#) Fr. Stephen Somerville [publicly renounced](#) his participation in ICEL – the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. He had been the youngest member of that Commission which was responsible for the translation of the New Mass to English. But, after years of watching the destruction of the Church, he publicly regretted his action and apologized for being part of that Commission.

He returned to saying only the Tridentine Mass and, as a result, he was suspended by his superior. He told me that he did not accept this unmerited act of “suspension.” This act is praiseworthy.

But there have been other priests, even in Traditional Latin Mass circles, whose actions do merit suspension. The case of Msgr. Timothy Svea, formerly considered a champion of Traditionalism, is just one of many mentioned on this website. Msgr. Svea [pleaded guilty](#) in February 2002 to the civil charge of exposing himself to and molesting teenage boys. He was convicted and sent to prison. (“Bishop Takes Queen”)

For a priest to have his faculties withdrawn because he defended the Faith is one thing. To have them withdrawn because of an act of clerical sexual abuse of children is quite another. The moral issue supersedes any other considerations, and the disciplinary punishment against him must be enforced.

Therefore, I believe that the irregular canonical situation of independent priests – such as the three priests who run OLHC – caused by their refusal of Vatican II and the New Mass should not be confused with the irregular situation of a priest who is convicted of pedophilia and tries to circumvent that conviction by uniting himself to the first group.

While the lack of jurisdiction of the first group – independent priests – must not be considered as relevant until the crisis in the Church ceases, the lack of jurisdiction that comes from sanctions against the second group – pedophile priests – must be considered as relevant because it reflects a just punishment against a dreadful crime.

### **Should Fr. Colletti be allowed to return to the OLHC chapel?**

I believe that unless Fr. Colletti publicly explains the charges and punishment made against him by the CDF and has his explanation approved by that same Congregation, he should not be allowed to return.

### **Final thoughts**

Those who are trying to force his return because they have been unaware of these facts now have a clear and detailed report of them. If others force his return while disregarding these now-known facts, they may well be accused of complicity with and covering for an abuser of minors (what U. S. law calls “aiding and abetting”).

The same accusation may be true for those who publicly withhold the truth of Fr. Colletti's background from the lay faithful, and for those who, knowing these facts disregard them and meet regularly with Fr. Colletti.

