

Romanian Catholic Diocese of St. George in Canton, OH
1121 44th Street NE Canton, OH 44714-1297
www.romaniancatholic.org

Contact: Rev. Chris Terhes, Director of Communications
chris@rcdcanton.org
Telephone: 714-746-0623

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Romanian Catholic Diocese on the sentencing of Father Andre A. Matthews

October 30, 2013 – Canton, OH – The Romanian Catholic Diocese of St. George in Canton, OH, received notice of Father André A. Matthews’ sentencing, on October 30, to two years in prison by Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, and hopes that any funds he had stolen or misappropriated will be restituted.

Father Matthews, 54, had been the pastor of St. Helena Romanian Catholic Parish in Cleveland from 1990 until his resignation in 2011.

In September 2011 the Diocese, pending investigation of allegations against him of misappropriation of parish funds, put Father Matthews on leave of absence. His voluntary resignation as Pastor of St. Helena was accepted at that time by the diocesan bishop, the Most Reverend John Michael Botean.

In June, 2013, he pled guilty in court to stealing \$176,000 from the parish. Also, on July 17, 2013, he pled guilty to “misappropriation of funds” from an 88-year-old woman who was a parishioner of the church.

Following his guilty plea in civil court, Father André A. Matthews was suspended from priestly ministry as of July 18, 2013, and all faculties of the Diocese of St. George have been revoked.

Now, that the criminal proceedings are complete, Father Matthews’ case will also be introduced to the appropriate ecclesiastical tribunals for trial, according to the norms for a penal process set forth in the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. This Code, promulgated by Bl. Pope John Paul II, is the common law of all Eastern-Rite Catholic Churches, i.e., those Churches that are in full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome.

“Until the final decision of these ecclesiastical tribunals, Father Matthews remains suspended from priestly ministry,” said Fr. Terhes, Director of Communications for the Diocese. “He was and is forbidden to celebrate any sacraments or represent himself as a priest.”

His suspension has been communicated within the diocese, and the U.S. Catholic hierarchy was kept informed of his status through normal communication with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“While due process was observed, the Diocese had fully supported St. Helena parish in this process and had done all it has been able to do to help it get through this crisis and get back to being the full and flourishing parish it has been for the last 108 years,” Fr. Terhes said.

St. Helena parish was established in 1905 and is the first and oldest Romanian religious community in United States.

“These allegations had been a shock and heartbreak to me personally, the members of St. Helena church, the clergy and faithful of the diocese, and the entire Romanian Catholic Church in the US and in Romania,” Bishop Botean said.

“The Church owes a debt of gratitude to the parishioners of St. Helena, and to everyone who worked hard to bring this situation to light. We also are most grateful to the civil authorities, without whose efforts it would have been very difficult for us to discover the facts of the case,” Bishop Botean added.

“This kind of action on the part of a trusted pastor and minister of the Church cannot, and will not be tolerated. We deeply regret the pain and loss suffered by so many of our faithful as a result of the actions of one priest. The Diocese is looking forward to full restitution to St. Helena of any amounts that the State found at issue and owing to the parish,” Bishop Botean concluded.

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