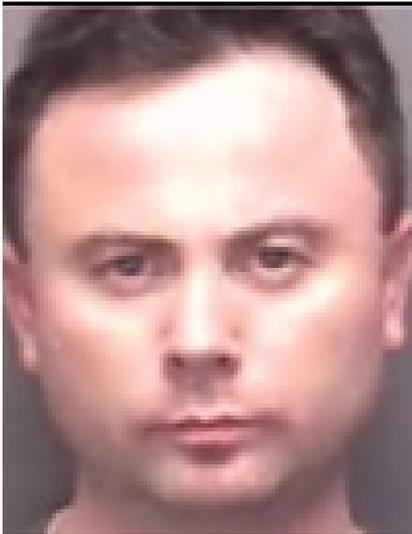


## VIRGINIA: Priest resigns after domestic assault charge

Written by Jeff Sheler, The Virginian-Pilot  
Wednesday, 07 December 2011 00:00

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{lang: 'en-GB'}



SUFFOLK -- The young, recently divorced mother of two was troubled and went to her priest for counseling. She said the Rev. Piotr Bialkowski took a special interest in her, gained her confidence and became like a member of the family.

Soon, as the woman tells it, things turned more personal. He told her she was beautiful and invited her to dinner. That led to other private get-togethers, at the priest's home and elsewhere. Eventually, the relationship became sexual.

Then their baby came, she said, and the relationship changed. Feeling pangs of guilt, the woman broke off what by then was a two-year relationship.

The priest became jealous and abusive and accused her of seeing someone else. Two weeks ago, the woman said, he showed up at her home in a rage and threw her against a wall. Police were called and the priest was arrested.

Last week, police charged Bialkowski with domestic assault.

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Bialkowski, 36, resigned as pastor of two Western Tidewater parishes - St. Mary of the Presentation in Suffolk and Church of the Good Shepherd in Smithfield - he had served since 2006 and 2008, respectively.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Richmond has suspended him from all priestly duties.

The woman, 37, who was not identified in police reports and asked not to be identified in this story, said she is seeing a counselor and is trying to pull her life together.

"I'm upset, depressed and scared," she said in a phone interview. "I don't feel safe at all." She said she has obtained a protective court order against Bialkowski.

A voice message left on Bialkowski's home phone was not returned. After his arrest, he was released on a \$1,000 surety bond and ordered to appear in Suffolk Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court on Dec. 15.

Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Richmond, in a letter to the two parishes last week, said the diocese had been "made aware of an accusation of improper conduct" involving the priest. He did not go into detail.

"There was an immediate investigation, and Father Bialkowski confirmed that the accusation is true," the bishop wrote. "He has resigned as pastor, effective immediately. He has also been suspended from all priestly duties, and will be leaving the parish in the next few days."

The woman Bialkowski is accused of assaulting described herself as a convert to Roman Catholicism who grew up Southern Baptist.

She said Bialkowski confirmed her as a member at St. Mary of the Presentation and baptized

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her children. He also helped her obtain an annulment after her marriage broke up.

"He was just a huge part of our family," she said.

During counseling over several months, she said, "He learned everything about me."

"Then one night after Mass," she said, "he pulled me aside and said, 'Do you want to go eat?' I said, 'Now?' "

They went to dinner along with the woman's 10-year-old daughter. Soon after that, she said, "He started texting me a lot," and then invited her to his home.

"He offered me some wine, and I guess I had a little too much." She said they had sex, and that was the beginning of a two-year relationship.

After their baby was born, she said, "He came around less often but would come to visit our daughter." Sometimes, she said, "He would just show up in the middle of the night and want sex."

She said when she refused, he became angry. "I felt like a prostitute," she said.

After their break-up, she said, he became jealous and belligerent and accused her of seeing other men.

"He said he loved me and wanted to spend his life with me, but he said he didn't want to leave the priesthood."

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Bishop DiLorenzo said he is in the process of seeking a new pastor for the two parishes Bialkowski had served.

Members of the parishes reached by phone called the turn of events "unsettling" but said parishioners seemed to be holding up.

"It's difficult to find out about something like this," said Andrea Stephens, a nursery volunteer at Good Shepherd. "I think we just need some time to heal and get over it so we can move on."

"He was a wonderful pastor and a good friend," said Tillie Rivenbark, who works in pastoral care ministry at St. Mary of the Presentation. "I'd let it stand at that."

According to a biography on the St. Mary website, Bialkowski is a native of Radom, Poland, and was ordained to the priesthood in June 2000.

He served in Poland until he came to Virginia in 2004. His first assignment was Blessed Sacrament Church in Norfolk, followed by Prince of Peace parish in Chesapeake.

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<http://hamptonroads.com/2011/12/suffolk-priest-charged-domestic-assault-resigns>