

French priest suspended after Freemasonry revealed

Paris, France, Jun 11, 2013 / 02:02 am (CNA).- Bishop Yves Boivineau of Annecy in southeastern France has barred a local priest from public ministry after he was exposed as an active Freemason.

Father Pascal Vesin, 43, was suspended for his active membership in a Masonic lodge of the Grand Orient of France. He became a member in 2001, five years after his 1996 ordination as a Catholic priest, the French newspaper Le Figaro reports.

The priest served a parish in the Alpine ski resort of Megeve and Bishop Boivineau suspended him at Rome's request, his parish said.

Membership in Masonic societies has long been condemned by the Catholic Church. This condemnation was repeated in a 1983 document from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, which said Masonic principles "have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church."

"The faithful who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion," the congregation said in a declaration signed by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI.

The disciplinary action against Fr. Vesin followed the priest's refusal to renounce Freemasonry.

The priest told Le Figaro that he did not choose to place Freemasonry against the Church. He said his action is "the expression of my absolute freedom of conscience within the Catholic institution."

The diocese said that the priest's suspension is not final and can be lifted. It described it as a "medicinal" penalty intended to encourage the priest's return to Catholic practice.

The Catholic Church has opposed Freemasonry on account of its secret nature, its religious indifferentism and its history of conspiring against the Church.

A 1985 letter to the U.S. bishops by then-Archbishop of Boston Cardinal Bernard Law criticized Freemasonry's dedication to a form of "naturalistic" religion that is "incompatible with Christian faith and practice."