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## **Bishop Removes Priest from Ministry**

Albany Cleric Who Admitted in 1986 to Sexual Abuse Is Coming Back to Albany but Won't Be Reassigned

By Andrew Tilghman  
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A priest accused of molesting at least three children in Albany more than 15 years ago has been removed from his latest position in New Mexico, following Bishop Howard Hubbard's review of clergymen from his diocese who were accused of pedophilia, church officials said.

The Rev. David Bentley, 59, who was ordained in 1975 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and was most recently assigned to a small parish in Deming, N.M., was called back to Albany and will not be reassigned because of a history of sexually abusing children, according to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany.

"Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, in reviewing Father Bentley's file in light of current concerns nationally over the issue of sexual abuse, has decided to remove Father Bentley from ministry entirely," the diocese said in a statement released Monday.

Although Bentley left the Capital Region shortly after sexual abuse allegations surfaced against him in 1986, church officials said the details of his personnel file followed him wherever he went, and supervisors were notified to keep him away from certain responsibilities involving children.

Bentley's first assignment after ordination was at St. Brigid's Church in Copake Falls. He taught religious studies at Cardinal McCloskey High School in Albany before becoming principal of Vincentian Institute High School in September 1976. Ten years later, the church first received complaints about Bentley's "improper sexual conduct with minors," the church statement said.

In 1986, Bentley admitted that he sexually abused a child. He was sent to a Catholic-run treatment center. After several months there, psychologists affiliated with the treatment program deemed him "fit" to return to the priesthood and he was reassigned "under supervised conditions," the diocese said.

Subsequently, other complaints about Bentley's past arose. In 1997, the Albany diocese paid a \$70,000 settlement to Thomas Oathout of Watervliet, who accused Bentley of sexually abusing him and his siblings in the late 1970s when they lived at the Albany Home for Children, now Parsons Child and Family Center.

Because Bentley was ordained in Albany, church officials here have supervised his entire 27 years in the priesthood, no matter where he was assigned.

On April 5, Hubbard contacted Bentley, and the following day Bentley resigned from his job with the Diocese of Las Cruces, where he was an assistant parish priest at the small church in Deming. He lived in the rectory there with another priest and spent weekends at a Franciscan retreat, the New Mexico church officials said.

Bentley is one of nine Albany diocesan priests whom church officials say sexually abused children in the past 20 years, a public revelation in February that prompted the diocese to create a task force to reconsider its policy on sexual abuse by the clergy.

The Rev. Kenneth Doyle, spokesman for the diocese, said Monday that he was unsure how many of those nine remain on active assignment. Diocese officials are not aware at this point of any other priests who will be recalled the way Bentley was, Doyle said.

Following Bentley's admission of sexual misconduct, Bentley did a brief stint in the hospital ministry, which included working at Albany Medical Center, where he previously had been a chaplain and acting director of pastoral care. But he soon left the Capital Region, signing on with the Franciscan Fathers for assignments in Ohio and Africa.

Church officials said they received no complaints about Bentley for abuse occurring after 1986. "Because of his successful treatment and absence of any incidents for more than 15 years," he was assigned to a parish in 2000, said Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of the Las Cruces Diocese.

On Monday, Albany County District Attorney Paul Clyne said he was unaware of any criminal investigation involving Bentley. Several factors, including when Bentley left the state, could make it possible to extend New York's standard five-year statute of limitations on felony cases, Clyne said.

Bentley has family in the Capital Region and will continue to receive a stipend from the diocese although he will not have an assignment. "He's our responsibility," Doyle said.

Churches around the country are re-evaluating the way they handle sexual abuse among the clergy. The Catholic Diocese of Syracuse announced Monday that it will create a victims' advocate position and a lay advisory board to help handle cases of sexual abuse involving priests.

Sister Catherine Darcy, an administrator at the diocese in New Mexico, said Bentley's removal was entirely due to Hubbard's phone call from Albany. The Las Cruces diocese never had any problems with Bentley, but his removal came as no surprise to her, she said.

"I think the landscape has changed considerably, and the church is going to be handling these situations very differently than they did in the past," Sister Darcy said. "We're just coming to a whole different understanding of what the situation is."FACTS:Tracking the Rev. David Bentley1975 — Ordained in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany.1986 — Admits to sexual misconduct with a minor and undergoes treatment for several months. Bentley is reassigned to a hospital ministry in the Capital Region and later, with permission from the Diocese of Albany, worked for the Franciscan fathers in Ohio and Africa.1997 — Diocese pays a \$70,000 settlement to a Watervliet man accusing Bentley of molesting he and his siblings at an Albany orphanage during the 1970s.1998 — Bentley begins working at a small parish in Deming, N.M.2002 — Bishop Howard Hubbard calls Bentley back to New York and announces that the priest will not be reassigned. Sources: Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany and Times Union archives