

# BishopAccountability.org

---

## **Diocese Suspends Another Priest**

Action against Joseph R. Romano, Now Living in Florida, Follows Accusations of Sexual Abuse of Minors

By Mike Goodwin  
Times Union (Albany, NY)  
February 10, 2003

A Priest Who Once Served As Chaplain For The Albany Fire Department And As A Parochial School Principal Has Been Removed From Active Ministry While The Roman Catholic Diocese Of Albany Investigates What Church Officials Deem "credible" Accusations That He Sexually Abused Two Minors In The 1970s And 1980s.

The Rev. Joseph R. Romano, Who Retired As A Prison Chaplain In 1999 And Currently Lives In Florida, Was Notified Of The Suspension Saturday By Bishop Howard Hubbard. He Is The Second Priest In Less Than A Week To Be Placed On Leave While The Diocese Investigates Allegations Of Sexual Misconduct.

He Is Also The Second Priest To Serve As An Assistant Principal At The Former Cardinal McCloskey High School In Albany During The Mid-1970s Who Has Been Accused Of Sexual Misconduct.

Hubbard Made His Decision After A Church-hired Private Investigator Looked Into Two Recent Complaints Of Sexual Abuse By Romano And Shared The Findings With The Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Panel, Church Officials Said. One Of The Allegations Was Brought To The Diocese Late Last Summer; The Second Within The Past Month.

"That Panel Has Deemed The Allegations To Be Credible Though Not Yet Proven And Recommended To Bishop Hubbard That He Remove Father Romano Temporarily From All Public Ministry In The Albany Diocese Or Elsewhere," Church Officials Said In A Statement Released Sunday Announcing Romano's Suspension.

Church Officials In Florida Were Notified About Romano's Suspension, According To The Diocese.

The Diocese Will Further Investigate The Allegations Before A Final Decision Is Made In Romano's Case.

Hubbard's Action Brings To Eight The Number Of Priests Removed Or Suspended By The Albany Diocese For Alleged Sexual Abuse Of Children.

The Rev. Kenneth Doyle Said The Panel Is Looking Into Sexual Misconduct Allegations Against Other Priests, But He Declined To Reveal The Number Of Clerics That Might Ultimately Face Removal. "what The Result Of Those Cases Is Going To Be, I Can't Forecast At This Point," He Said.

Romano's Suspension Came Five Days After The Rev. James F. Kelly Was Removed From Active Duty While Church Officials Investigate Complaints Against Him. Kelly, Who Had Been Accused Of Sexual Misconduct While Working In Rensselaer In The 1980s, Most Recently Worked As A Prison Chaplain In Carson City, Nev.

For Years Albany Church Officials Considered Ministries In Jail, Prisons, Hospitals And Nursing Homes To Be Appropriate Assignments For Priests Accused Of Sexually Abusing Children, Diocese Officials Have Said.

In June, The Diocese Removed Six Priests Because Of Alleged Sexual Abuse Of Minors.

Romano, 63, And One Of Those Priests, The Rev. David G. Bentley, 61, Both Served As Assistant Principals At Cardinal McCloskey High School. Romano Held That Position In 1974. Bentley Was An Assistant Principal Two Years Later.; Romano Was Ordained In 1966. He Became Fire Department Chaplain In 1967 And Held The Position Until 1984. He Was Also Coordinator Of Religious Education At Lasalle School In Albany From 1981 To 1984.

That Year, He Was Assigned To Be Chaplain At Greene County Correctional Facility. He Retired As Prison Chaplain In 1999.

He Also Served As Pastor Of St. Ann's Church In Albany From 1974 To 1977 And Then At St. Lucy's In Altamont For Four Years.

Romano Had Friends In High Places. He Was Close To The Late Dan O'connell, The Powerful Chairman Of The Albany County Democratic Party During The Erastus Corning 2nd Era In Albany Politics.

He Was Also O'connell's Confessor, Visiting The Aging Political Boss At His Home Off Whitehall Road When O'connell Was A Shut-in In Failing Health. He Heard O'connell's Last Confession.

But The Two Were Once Adversaries.

Romano Was Strongly Criticized By O'connell And Corning When, As Chaplain Of The Albany Police And Fire Departments, He Backed Efforts In The 1970s To Unionize Those Agencies.

After His Death In 1977, O'connell Who Was An American History Buff Left Romano Several Items, Including Books And Memorabilia From His Civil War Collection.

The Diocese Has Acknowledged It Paid Out More Than \$2.3 Million To Victims Of Sexual Abuse Over A 25-year Period.

**John Aretakis, An Area Attorney Who Represents Dozens Of People Who Say They Were Abused By Priests, Said He Was Recently Retained By A Man Who Claimed Romano Abused Him As A Child In The 1980s. Aretakis Said The Man Spoke With The Diocese Investigator Last Month.**

**"It's Gratifying To Know That The Removal Of Priests From Active Ministry Is Finally Starting To Happen Because It Assists Victims In Healing And In Knowing That Some Modicum Of Justice Is Occurring," Aretakis Said. "equally As Important Is That Priests Are Being Taken Out Of Active Ministry, Making Children And The Community In General Safer." Staff Writer Andrew Tilghman Contributed To This Report**