

# Bishop Accountability

---

## Bishop Saw No Merit in Priest vs. Priest

By Daniel J. Wakin  
New York Times  
March 15, 2002

When a New Jersey priest went to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn with a detailed claim that one of its pastors had sexually abused him years ago, it came down to the word of one against the other. And Bishop Thomas V. Daily sided with his own, saying the charges were unfounded.

The New Jersey priest, the Rev. Timothy J. Lambert, said he had received neither justice nor consideration from the diocese, which he said never kept him informed about the investigation.

"I've certainly been treated like I'm the one who is a criminal," Father Lambert said yesterday. "I'm very upset with how the church has handled this, across the board. The dishonesty, the deceit, thinking they are above the law."

The diocese yesterday defended the bishop's decision to discount the charges brought by Father Lambert, now 44, against the Rev. Joseph P. Byrns, 59, who is the pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church in Kensington. Father Lambert said Father Byrns molested him for three years, starting when he was 11 and when Father Byrns was a priest in St. Anastasia Parish in Douglaston, Queens.

Father Byrns could not be reached for comment yesterday. A church employee who would not give her name said he was not in the rectory and not available by phone. He has denied the allegations to The Boston Globe, which first reported the case yesterday.

Frank DeRosa, a spokesman for the diocese, said the case was thoroughly investigated. "The conclusion was that Father Byrns had established a credibility in his denials," Mr. DeRosa said. "He was vehemently denying everything that was charged." In coming to his decision, Bishop Daily took into account the absence of any other allegations against Father Byrns and his good reputation, Mr. DeRosa said.

Mr. DeRosa said diocesan officials also talked to Msgr. David L. Cassato, a friend of Father Lambert's.

In an interview yesterday, Monsignor Cassato said that in the early 1970's Father Lambert told him about "inappropriate behavior" involving Father Byrns.

Bishop Daily has drawn increasing scrutiny since January, when lawsuits filed in Boston alleged that while he was an auxiliary bishop there, he was aware of large-scale abuses by a priest, John Geoghan. The bishop was the defendant in lawsuits brought by victims and their families that were recently settled.

In an interview, Father Lambert said Father Byrns began molesting him when he was in the seventh grade, on a weekend trip with his two brothers. The abuse continued until he was a 10th grader, Father Lambert said, and he rebuffed the priest.

He called himself a "textbook case" of a molestation victim: "five children at home, father not on the scene, mother a very devout Catholic. I was an altar boy."

The boy went on to become a priest, remaining in contact with Father Byrns. But in July 1997, just after the death of his father, he confronted the older man.

"I started feeling very angry about these two men in my life. The incidents involving Byrns were

always in my face," he said.

Father Lambert said he then spent time in a Minnesota treatment center for alcohol abuse, and his counselor there reported the abuse to the Brooklyn Diocese under the state's mandatory reporting law.

It was in treatment that he told his brother Robert about the abuse, and his brother told him that he, too, had been abused by Father Byrns, Father Lambert said. "I had to pick my jaw up off the floor," he said.

In early 1998, he began meeting with diocesan officials to make sure that action would be taken against Father Byrns. But the contact stopped when the diocese refused to allow Father Lambert's therapist to take part in a meeting with diocesan officials and Father Byrns.

He then consulted a lawyer, Stephen Rubino. Mr. Rubino said he began negotiating a settlement with diocesan lawyers. The talks dragged on, he said, until the church cut them off because of a court ruling that would have hurt his client's case.

Mr. DeRosa said there were no negotiations, only a request from Mr. Rubino for a \$150,000 settlement, which was refused.

Father Lambert is on leave from the Diocese of Metuchen, N.J., and was recently laid off from his job as an orthopedic supplies salesman.

---

Original material copyright © BishopAccountability.org 2004. Reproduce freely with attribution.