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20 Years Ago, Accused Priest Never Returned Former Oswego Pastor Agreed to Undergo Treatment, Had Charges Dropped

By Mike McAndrew
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Two decades ago, FBI agents arrested the Rev. John F. Harrold, pastor at St. Mary Church in Oswego, and accused him of sending obscene child pornography through the U.S. mails.

Harrold had paid Spectra Photo Lab of North Syracuse to develop film containing images of nude boys, federal prosecutors said at the time. An undercover FBI agent working at the photo lab processed the film. Harrold was among 15 Spectra Photo customers arrested.

Harrold is one of two priests who served in the Syracuse area who were charged with sex-related offenses. In 1987, the Rev. John Lugowski, a Franciscan priest, pleaded guilty to felony counts of sexual abuse and sodomy of a 10-year-old boy. He served eight months in the Broome County jail.

The U.S. Attorney's office agreed to drop the felony charges against Harrold because the priest entered a psychiatric treatment center, federal prosecutors said at the time.

In the Harrold case, Syracuse diocese officials did not identify the boys in Harrold's photos and do not know if they were members of his parish, Auxilliary Bishop Thomas Costello said Wednesday.

After his arrest, Harrold never returned to active ministry in the Syracuse area.

However, he remained an ordained Syracuse diocese priest until 1997, said Danielle Cummings, communications director for the diocese.

Harrold, 56, has been listed almost every year since his arrest in the Official Catholic Directory as being "On Duty Outside the Diocese."

He was not working for the diocese and was not being compensated by it, however, Cummings said.

The Syracuse diocese allowed Harrold in 1983 to apply to join the Servants of the Paraclete, a religious order that ran the New Mexico treatment center where he was counseled, Costello said. For three years, Harrold worked in England in a Paraclete home for recovering alcoholics and in a retreat house in California, Costello said. In 1986, Harrold left the Paraclete order for unknown reasons, Costello said.

In 1997, the diocese requested Harrold resign as a priest after a routine check of personnel files revealed he was not engaged in active ministry, Costello said.

Harrold resides in Indio, Calif., a small town near Palm Springs, in the San Bernardino diocese.

Harrold works as a college psychology professor in California, said his mother, Rita Harrold of Oswego.

"He's leading a good life," she said.

Telephoned at his home, Harrold declined to talk to a reporter.

A Syracuse diocese update

1983: The Rev. John F. Harrold accused of sending obscene child pornography through the U.S. mail. The U.S. Attorney's Office drops felony charges after the diocese arranges for Harrold to enter a psychiatric treatment center. He resigns from the priesthood in 1997.

1987: Bishop Joseph T. O'Keefe named to replace retiring Bishop Frank J. Harrison as spiritual leader of the seven-county Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse. Harrison had served since 1977.

1987: The Rev. John Lugowski pleads guilty to felony counts of sexual abuse and sodomy of a 10-year-old boy. He serves eight months in the Broome County jail. Lugowski, a Franciscan priest at the time, reported to the superior of his religious community, not to the Syracuse diocese. He leaves the priesthood in 1989.

1990: A 14-year-old boy tells Syracuse police the Rev. Donald J. Hebert, pastor at Most Holy Rosary Church in Syracuse, fondled him on a camping trip. Syracuse police do not charge Hebert. The victim's family tell police they do not want him prosecuted because Hebert apologized to the family. Diocesan officials say Hebert reported the incident to them. They send the priest to Saint Luke Institute in Maryland for treatment. Medical professionals tell the diocese Hebert can be returned to parish work.

1993: Syracuse diocese implements policy on handling allegations of misconduct by priests. Under the policy, based on recommendations from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the vicar for priests interviews the complainant and, if he considers the allegations credible, he confronts the accused. If the allegations are believed credible, the priest is removed from parish ministry, evaluated by a mental health expert and may be sent for treatment.

1995: Bishop James M. Moynihan named to replace retiring Bishop O'Keefe, who had served since 1987. Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Costello, appointed in 1978, reappointed vicar general of the diocese. Costello serves as vicar general under bishops O'Keefe and Harrison.

1997: O'Keefe, the eighth bishop of the Syracuse diocese, dies at age 78.

1998: The diocese agrees to pay two Oswego County families a total of \$475,000 to settle lawsuits accusing the Rev. Daniel W. Casey of molesting three young boys in the 1980s. The lawsuits sought \$30 million in damages. Casey resigns from the priesthood. He dies in 2000.

1998: Monsignor Francis J. Furfaro, longtime pastor of St. Joseph Church in Oswego, accused of sexually abusing a young man for several years. Diocesan officials confront Furfaro and send him for treatment at Saint Luke Institute, Maryland. Furfaro retires from active ministry in 1991.

1999: Diocese pays Jon K. Mosley \$75,000 to settle sexual abuse allegations against Furfaro.

Feb. 23-24, 2002: Diocesan priests read a letter by Bishop James Moynihan at all weekend Masses. In the letter, Moynihan outlines the diocese's policy and assures Catholics he will not tolerate sexual abuse by priests.

Feb. 25: Onondaga County's lead prosecutor for sexual crimes and Syracuse's chief of police say victims should report allegations of sexual misconduct to legal authorities.

March 5: Diocesan officials report they are reviewing their policy on handling reports of sexual misconduct by priests.

March 21: LeMoyne College/Zogby International poll shows 85 percent of American Roman Catholics think the church should let police and courts handle accusations of child sexual abuse against priests.

March 25: State lawmakers introduce proposed legislation that would require clergy members to report all child sex abuse allegations to police or other authorities. The Senate proposal would cover allegations going back five years. Senate and Assembly bills would shield clergy from reporting abuse they learned about through confession or other ministering duties. Failure to report allegations would be a misdemeanor.

April 1: The diocese moves Rev. Donald J. Hebert, 55, from his position as pastor of St. Joseph/St. Patrick Church in Utica, and assigns him to an administrative position because he sexually abused a teen-age boy in 1990. The move was not related to any new allegations, officials said.

April 10: Diocesan officials report they are investigating "a few" new allegations of sexual abuse reported since Moynihan issued his letter in February. Officials will not name the priests accused. They say the cases involve minors and alleged incidents that occurred decades ago. They say the priests accused have been removed from parish ministry and sent for treatment. Officials also say the diocese will soon release a revised policy on handling allegations of misconduct by priests. District Attorney William Fitzpatrick says he has met with diocesan officials to discuss proposed changes in the policy.

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