

REC'D APR 11 2002

DIOCESE OF ORANGE



OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Director of Human Resources

THE DIOCESE OF ORANGE RELEASES INFORMATION ABOUT A DISMISSED PRIEST.

The Diocese is cooperating with Law Enforcement

April 11, 2002 – After learning yesterday from the Orange County Register and the Anaheim Police Department that an incident report was filed on Saturday, April 6, 2002 alleging years-old sexual misconduct by a dismissed priest, Sigfried Widera, Diocesan representatives made immediate contact with the Anaheim Police Department and reviewed the dismissed priest's inactive file for further information.

Relevant information gleaned from that review pertained to Diocesan activity in 1976. In 1976, Bishop William Johnson, the first Bishop of the then newly established Diocese of Orange, was requested by the Archbishop of Milwaukee, William Cousins, to accept Father Sigfried Widera into the Diocese of Orange. At the time, Fr. Widera was undergoing treatment for what was described by Archbishop Cousins as a "moral problem having to do with a boy in school". Bishop Johnson was assured that from all the professional medical information Archbishop Cousins gathered, there would be "no great risk" in allowing Fr. Widera to return to pastoral work and that Widera was transferring his treatment to a doctor in California where some of his family members resided.

Bishop Johnson accepted Fr. Widera with those assurances, as that was the professional thinking at the time. When the first information of a possible problem with children was brought to the attention of the Diocese of Orange in 1985 by the Child Protective Services, Fr. Widera was relieved of pastoral duties and his faculties as a priest and placed in a

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residential treatment program. He was discharged from the program the following year and he was not readmitted to this or any other diocese as an acting priest.

Child Protective Services conducted the investigation of the allegations in 1985. Bishop Johnson dealt with Sigfried Widera and removed him from the Diocese and removed any opportunity for him to again function as a priest. The Diocese does not have information of the results of that investigation.

According to Bishop Brown, "Today, if such a request were to be made by any Archdiocese or Diocese, the priest would not be admitted to pastoral work in the Diocese of Orange. While the acceptance of a priest undergoing treatment was considered acceptable then, it is not today and I regret any pain that may have been caused by accepting Fr. Widera in 1976."

Diocesan representatives are cooperating with the Anaheim Police Department. Both Bishop Johnson and Archbishop Cousins are deceased.

The Diocesan Web site, www.rcbo.org, now provides a complete explanation of the manner in which to report allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy, religious and lay personnel assigned in the Diocese of Orange. A toll-free and confidential telephone report line, 1-800-364-3064 has been made available for reports.

TB: Father McKernan

for
Sig Widera
file