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# Diocese reaction to abusers changing

■ Camden Diocese now strips accused pedophiles of their duties instead of transferring them.

**By PETE McALEER**  
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Thomas Harkins and Gerald Clements share a two-story home in a campus-style apartment complex run by the Camden Diocese.

For decades, they also shared sordid secrets.

Harkins joined the priesthood in 1971. Clements was ordained in 1970. By the end of

the decade, both had been accused of sexually assaulting children.

Both continued to serve as priests until this year.

Their careers offer a clear illustration of how the diocese's response to sex-abuse claims has changed in the past three decades.

In 1993, Harkins and Clements were named in a massive class-action lawsuit filed against the Camden Diocese. Both were then sent to new parishes in the city of Camden.

This past February,

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## Diocese

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the diocese removed Harkins and one other priest, the Rev. John P. Connor, from active ministry. Within weeks, Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio announced the diocese had no active priests credibly accused of sexual assault.

For years, priests were sent for treatment but victims' claims often were ignored.

After the 1993 lawsuit, priests were given new assignments, often away from children.

In 2002, priests who had been accused decades earlier were suddenly removed from ministry.

When the 1993 lawsuit was filed, the diocese settled with Clements' accuser — a man who says he was in the sixth grade when Clements forced him to perform oral sex.

The Camden Diocese also sent settlement checks to two of Harkins accusers that year, including a Hammonton woman who told the church in 1986 that Harkins had raped her when she was a teenager at St. Anthony's Church.

By that time, Harkins had spent four stints in treatment centers for pedophiles.

After settling with his alleged victims, the diocese decided to try a new tack with Harkins.

They sent him to a parish without children.

According to diocese spokesman Andrew Walton, the 35 parishioners at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Camden, where Harkins remained until 2000, were all adults.

But Clements' new parish — St. Joseph's Pro-Cathedral — was not child-free. In the mid-1980s, Msgr. Philip Rigney was accused of raping two teenage boys in the St. Joseph's rectory. Rigney retired from the church in 1986.

Connor — who admitted to molesting a Cape May County boy in 1984 — also got a new home in 1993. He was transferred to Cumberland County, where he served as a chaplain at Bridgeton Hospital.

Walton said therapists who treated Connor gave approval for him to return to active ministry.

"At the time, professional therapists believed that sexual addictions of this kind could be treated," Walton said. "Today we know they can sometimes be controlled, but they cannot

be cured. Because our first concern is the safety of the young people entrusted to our care, the diocese made the decision earlier this year to relieve Father Connor of his assignment at Bridgeton Hospital."

Many saw the February dismissal of Harkins and Connor as a direct response to the national scandal engulfing the Roman Catholic Church. Walton said the decision to remove the two priests was part of a new philosophy that DiMarzio brought to the diocese three years ago.

"When Bishop DiMarzio came to Camden in July 1999, he made it clear right away that he would begin to implement a policy whereby those credibly accused of abuse would not be given parish assignments," Walton said.

In 1993, sex abuse in the church was still treated with skepticism by much of the public. The lawsuit filed by Rubino — which originally sought the dissolution of the Camden Diocese — was labeled "terrorism" by Bishop James McHugh. McHugh, now deceased, also called Rubino an extortionist. Yet he worked quickly to find a new home for the priests who had been accused.

A review of The Official Catholic Directory shows that seven of the eight active priests named in the 1993 lawsuit left their parishes within a year. Four went to new parishes. The others retired, were placed on sick leave or left the church altogether. The only priest to stay put, the Rev. Augustine Seidenberg, retired in 1996.

Seidenberg, who now lives in Somers Point, is one of 14 priests named in a class-action lawsuit still being heard in Atlantic County Superior Court.

Also named in the suit is the Rev. William Titmas, who moved into the Vianney Villa home in 1995, the same year as Clements. A few months ago, Titmas moved into a nursing home in Pleasantville.

An elderly man answering the door at the Vianney Villa house said Harkins and Clements were not home. The two have avoided media contact over the past few months.

"I'm sorry," the man said. "I don't think they'll have anything to say. You'll have to talk to the diocese."

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## Where they are now

In 1993, a massive class-action lawsuit was filed against the Diocese of Camden, charging that the church concealed accusations of sexual abuse by its priests.

Some cases were settled by the diocese; others still are being heard by the court. The following chart shows where the priests named in the original lawsuit went after 1993.

\* — Denotes priests whose cases already have been settled by the diocese.

■ The Rev. John P. Bernard  
Retired in 1994 as hospital chaplain in Batavia, N.Y.  
Lives in Elkton, Md.

■ The Rev. Gerald Clements\*  
Transferred from St. Peter's in Merchantville to St. Joseph's Pro-Cathedral Church in Camden in 1993.  
Moved to Vianney Villa retirement home in Cherry Hill in 1995.

■ Norman T. Connelly  
Sent to Epiphany Cathedral in Venice, Fla., in 1992.  
Left priesthood in 1993.

■ John P. Connor\*  
Transferred from a parish in Conshohocken, Pa., in 1993 to Bridgeton Hospital, where he served as chaplain.  
Removed from ministry in February 2002; lives in church-run retirement home.

■ Thomas Harkins\*  
Transferred from St. Stephen in Pennsauken to Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Camden in 1993.

Sent to Vianney Villa retirement home in Cherry Hill in 2000.

■ James McIntyre  
Transferred from St. Mary's Parish in Cherry Hill to St. Maria Goretti's in Runnemede in 1993.

In 1998 was transferred to Holy Family Church in Washington Township, where he remains active.

(The diocese maintains the accusations against McIntyre are not credible.)

■ Joseph McGarvey\*  
Retired from St. Maria Goretti's in Runnemede in either 1992 or 1993.  
Lives in Audubon.

■ Philip Rigney  
Retired in 1986.  
Became active in Diocese of Palm Beach in 1991.  
Relieved of priestly duties by Palm Beach Diocese in 2002, after officials there learned of Camden Diocese lawsuit.

■ Augustine Seidenberg  
Remained at St. Augustine's Church in Ocean City until retirement in 1996.  
Lives in Somers Point.

■ Joseph Shannon  
Removed from ministry in 1990.  
Listed as "on sick leave."  
Resides in a treatment center outside of St. Louis.

■ William Titmas  
Remained active at St. Mary's Church in Salem in 1993. Went on sick leave in 1994.  
Sent to Vianney Villa retirement home in Cherry Hill in 1995 or 1996.

## Police arrest 9 in human-smuggling ring

Associated Press

**ROTTERDAM** — Dutch police arrested nine Chinese who allegedly helped smuggle illegal immigrants to England, including the 58 Chinese who suffocated in the back of a truck two years ago, a justice official said Monday.

Police also found 25 Chinese in several houses waiting for transportation to Britain.

The arrests broke the ring two years ago after customs agents in the English port of Dover found 58 bodies in a truck brought by ferry, a prosecutor said.

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