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Nov. 1985

Siegfried W. J. J. J.

In 1976, Bishop Johnson, the first Bishop of the newly established Diocese of Orange, was requested by the Archbishop of Milwaukee to accept Father Sigfried Widera. 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 information Archbishop Cousins could gather, there would be "no great risk" in allowing Fr. Widera to return to pastoral work and that he was transferring his treatment to a doctor in California where some of Widera's 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 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.

We are informed that 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. We do not have any information of the results of that investigation.

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 we regret any pain that may have been caused by accepting Widera in 1976.

*4/10/02 - e-mailed to Valerie Hodson
A. Regulus*

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LOCAL

Ex-O.C. priest relocated, prospered

Sigfried Widera, accused of sexual crimes in O.C. and convicted in Milwaukee, lives in Arizona now.

April 12, 2002

By BILL RAMS and VALERIA GODINES
The Orange County Register

TUCSON -- Father Sigfried Widera, banished from the Diocese of Orange in 1985 following allegations of sexual abuse, disappeared into the Arizona desert and created a new life - one that included golfing at a country club, volunteering at a Catholic hospital and working 50-hour weeks at his brother's business.

His new circle of friends - a minister, other hospital volunteers, his physician and an array of neighbors - knew nothing about his past. Few knew he was a priest, much less a priest facing at least a half-dozen allegations of sexual abuse.

Widera, 61, could not be reached for comment in Arizona. Friends and co-workers there painted a portrait of a simple, hard-working man who last year for Christmas gave his secretary a designer handbag, a ham and a turkey. To them, he is a workaholic who doesn't like to cook, so he eats out a lot or dines at their homes. They praise his prowess on the golf course.

But Widera's life has been far more complex than that, newspaper clippings, property records and interviews show.

On Wednesday, the Diocese of Orange disclosed that it accepted Widera into its ranks in 1976 even though it was aware of his previous sexual problems at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. In 1973, Widera was arrested and sentenced to three years' probation on a charge of sexual perversion involving a 14-year-old boy, according to the Milwaukee Sentinel. In Orange County, he faced at least six allegations of sexual abuse with minors. He worked at St. Justin Martyr Church in Anaheim and St. Edward Church in Dana Point. Lenihan is alleged to have impregnated a teen-ager and paid for her abortion.

Widera, who was never prosecuted for any of the crimes alleged in

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Orange County, has been in and out of treatment for his sexual problems, according to both diocese.

In 1976, three years after his sentencing, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee contacted church officials here to recommend a transfer. The late archbishop in Milwaukee said Widera was receiving treatment related to a "moral problem having to do with a boy in school," according to correspondence between the two bishops. Officials with the Diocese of Orange said they were never informed of his criminal record.

It wasn't long after he came to Orange County that other allegations surfaced.

On Thursday, a new accuser, Diana Clausen of Mission Viejo, came forward to say that in 1978, when she was in eighth grade at St. Justin Martyr Catholic School in Anaheim, Widera touched her breasts while giving her and a friend a ride in his car.

Clausen said her parents reported the incident to the school principal, but the principal did not believe her. Her parents did not report it to anyone else, she said.

Widera lost his job with the Diocese of Orange and later was barred from practicing as a priest. He was sent to therapy for one year in New Mexico. Then he moved to Arizona, where he lived in a trailer. Neighbors there don't remember much about him.

Widera now lives in a \$200,000 Spanish-mission-style home across from GreenValley Country Club, where he is a member. His one-story home has a stone walkway and a neat yard.

Widera works for his brother, John Widera of Costa Mesa, who runs Tucson Container Corp., Kino Packaging and Kino Foam.

"This is a great company and Sieg is a great boss," said Joe Chavez, a customer-service representative. "He runs a tight ship and makes an effort to know all employees."

There are three framed trade magazine articles in the 50,000-square-foot office. One says the company has grown 20 percent in the past three years.

Fede Molina, a receptionist at the company for five years, said Sigfried Widera manages 80 people. He makes sure deadlines are met and clients are cared for, she said.

"The man is here all the time, like 50 hours a week," Molina said. In the afternoon, she said, Widera's brother called and said he would not

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return to work.

"He said he's retiring," Molina said. "And that happens on the same day you're here. Can you please tell me what's going on? Do you even know?"

Widera left work early only on the nights that he volunteered at St. Mary's Hospital on the information desk.

"He's fabulous at the info desk," said Roger Kuntz, the hospital's volunteer director. "He answers phones, he tells patients where to go, he fills in whenever we need him. We would hate to lose him."

Kuntz described Widera as one of the most reliable of his 200 senior volunteers.

Father Jim Madden, St. Mary's staff priest, said Widera confided in him 10 years ago that he used to be a priest but didn't say why he no longer was.

"Either way, I'll treat him the same way. We're all fragile human beings, and Sieg has always been good to me."

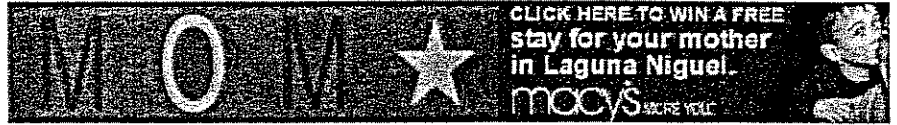
Register news researcher Mike Rosentreter contributed to this report.



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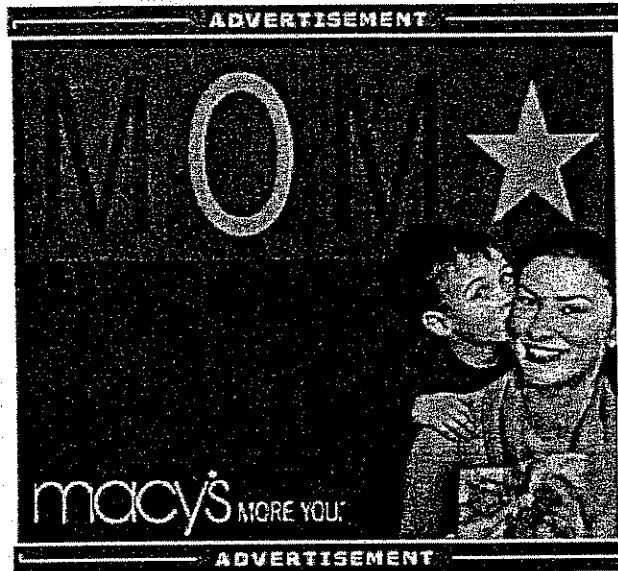
Priest Was Welcomed Despite 'Moral Problem'

■ Scandal: Diocese of Orange accepted him in 1976 after report of misconduct; he was fired in 1985 following more allegations of abuse.

By WILLIAM LOBDELL, TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange this week admitted it welcomed a Milwaukee priest into its ranks despite a warning from his superior that he had a "moral problem having to do with a boy in school."

Father Sigfried Widera was accepted into the Diocese of Orange in 1976 though he was undergoing counseling for still-unspecified priestly misconduct. In 1985, other allegations of sexual misconduct with children surfaced, and Widera was fired.



Church officials said they don't know when, if ever, the 1985 accusations were settled. The allegation emerged Saturday when a 32-year-old r filed a report with the Anaheim Police Department saying he was sexually abu by Widera after the priest arrived in Ori County.

Neither Widera nor the alleged victim could be reached for comment Thursda

Diocese of Orange Bishop Tod D. Brov said in a written statement that Widera would not have been accepted if current standards been applied. "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 accep Father Widera in 1976."

Diocesan officials said that when Widera was transferred, the archbishop of Milwaukee, William Cousins, told colleague William Johnson, then the bishop of Orange, that the pri posed "no great risk" to children despite his past problem. Johnson and Cousins are dece

When new accusations surfaced in 1985, Johnson stripped Widera of his duties, effective ending his career as a priest.

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Widera also was sent to a treatment program in New Mexico, church officials said.

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TOP NEWS

O.C. diocese took priest with known sex problem

The Rev. Sigfried Widera was undergoing counseling when transferred from Milwaukee.

April 11, 2002

By VALERIA GODINES and BILL RAMS
The Orange County Register

The first evidence was uncovered Wednesday that the Diocese of Orange accepted from another archdiocese the transfer of a priest with a known sexual problem.

The Rev. Sigfried Widera, who was undergoing counseling at the time of his transfer from Milwaukee, faced at least six allegations of sexual abuse in Orange County after he arrived here in 1976.

One accuser, Christopher Huicochea, now a 32-year-old Anaheim man who teaches English, filed a report with the Anaheim Police Department on Saturday. He alleges that Widera fondled him at home when he was 10 - just weeks after Widera delivered the Mass at his father's funeral.

The Diocese of Orange removed Widera, a beloved motorcycle-riding priest who used the CB radio moniker "German Shepherd," in 1985 after it was notified by Child Protective Services that he was suspected of having abused children.

The Orange County revelations come during a 48-hour period in which church officials up and down the state grappled with new cases or developments involving priest-abuse allegations. In San Francisco, a priest accused of attacking a news photographer covering his rape trial was jailed.

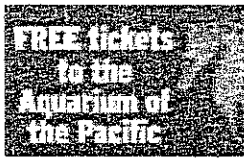
A priest in a Franciscan seminary in Santa Ynez was removed after being accused of grabbing boys' genitals during wrestling matches he orchestrated while teaching high school in La Cañada Flintridge.

And the Diocese of Orange this week received another sexual misconduct allegation against Monsignor Lawrence Baird, who has

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adamantly denied the accusations. Church officials say they have invited the latest accuser to come forward and discuss it with them but the caller has not yet responded.

The old Widera files surfaced when the Orange Diocese officials pored over personnel records Wednesday in response to requests by The Orange County Register.

Widera was never charged with a crime in Orange County, and it is unclear whether Child Protective Services or the diocese reported the allegations to law enforcement at the time. Debbie Kroner, spokeswoman for Child Protective Services, said she cannot legally comment on child-abuse cases. Generally, she said, substantiated complaints are referred to local police for investigation.

Widera, who parishioners say liked to give their children rides on his motorcycle and play basketball with them, could not be reached for comment. One relative defended him.

"This is ridiculous," said Leslie Widera, his sister-in-law, of Costa Mesa. "Everyone is coming forward with stories. They think they'll make millions. It is totally absurd."

Widera described her brother-in-law as very caring. "He's wonderful. They all loved him," she said. "I think it's total insane and ridiculous. I don't see any proof."

The Diocese of Orange said it removed Widera swiftly in 1985 as soon as it became aware that he was suspected of sexually abusing children here. The diocese sent Widera for therapy for one year in New Mexico.

The late Bishop William Johnson agreed to admit him into the diocese in 1976 even though he knew of his past problems according to the diocese correspondence. The late Bishop William Cousins at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee told Johnson that Widera had been undergoing treatment and Widera was transferring to a doctor in California where he had family. Cousins assured Johnson that Widera would pose no great risk.

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

Diocese officials said they didn't know more details about the nature of any allegations against Widera in Milwaukee.

Huicochea said he was saddened by the latest allegations but felt validated.

"It has angered me that the church has protected these people and has not given due process to these people who have done these crimes," he said. "I don't want to say everybody in the church is bad. ... It is unbelievable that they would protect this kind of behavior.

"I don't want anybody to experience what I went through. I am not doing this because I want to see the church go down. I just want to see things change."

Widera served as a priest at St. Justin Martyr Church in Anaheim, where Huicochea's mother still works and attends.

Carol Preimesberger, a former parishioner, described Widera as a close friend she had over to her Anaheim home numerous times to play the card game Shiphead.

"We're from Wisconsin, and so is he," she said. "He was one of few people we knew who could actually play."

Her children, two sons, an adoptive son and a daughter, also thought highly of him, Preimesberger said. "He rode a motorcycle and took my children on rides around the block," she said. "The kids thought it was really cool. He never did anything inappropriate. He was nothing but a kind person."

"There are certain priests I've had concerns about," said Preimesberger, a parishioner for 25 years. "But not him. Never. No way."



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