

## Blogging Religiously

FROM A NEW YORK POINT OF VIEW



### ABOUT THIS BLOG

Religion writer Gary Stern comments on news and trends in the world of religion — in the Lower Hudson Valley and beyond.

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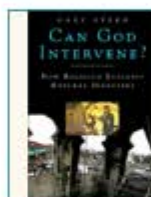
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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gary Stern** has covered religion for *The Journal News* for a decade. He's reported on just about every major religious group in New York's spiritual mix and covered many of the significant trends, stories and people of the day.



The world of religion, we don't have to tell you, is vast. The purpose of this blog is for Stern to note, flag and comment on some of the more interesting religious developments on the scene — weighty and quirky, somber and laughable, far away and just down the road. He won't interpret Scripture, take sides in conflicts or judge anyone. But he will take advantage of the journalist's license to observe.

Stern was once leery of taking on the religion beat. It's a sensitive subject, you know. But a wise editor told him "Just cover it like you would cover anything."

Since then, he's learned a lot about many hard-to-define elements of religious life, including the modern meaning of religious history, the myriad ways that people reconcile their faith with everyday life, and the unspoken cultural characteristics that help to define each faith and sect.

He's won some awards along the way, including the two highest honors given by the Religion Newswriters Association: National Religion Writer of the Year (2001) and National Religion Reporter of the Year (2005).

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Back in 2005, several New York priests who had been accused of sexual abuse were defrocked at once by the Vatican.

But there were other priests accused of abuse, priests who had been removed from ministry years before, whose cases were not closed.

Not surprisingly, no word was given on when their cases might be addressed.

Every now and then, one such priest is quietly defrocked—or, in Catholic parlance, "returned to the lay state" or "dismissed from the clerical state."

I was finally flipping through the latest edition of *Catholic New York* and saw this brief near the bottom of page 8:

*In accord with the provisions of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the following priest of the Archdiocese of New York, having had his case presented to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has been dismissed from the clerical state: John Lennon.*

And that's it.

Lennon was the 74-year-old pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Yonkers and a Yonkers Fire Department chaplain when he was removed in April 2002—just as the national sex-abuse crisis was exploding. He was accused of abuse from his days as a teacher and administrator at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx, more than a decade before.

Days later, an official from the archdiocese told the parish that the allegations against Lennon were "unsubstantiated" and that Lennon was insisting on his innocence.

Monsignor Edward O'Donnell, then vicar of priests for the archdiocese, said:

*It was my hope that this whole thing would be resolved very quickly, very expeditiously, and all this notoriety would have been unnecessary. I guess it has taken more time to get to this than I had hoped and I had anticipated, so I'm sorry for any disappointment or confusion that may have been caused by the delay in which information came to you.*

Six year later, it's safe to say that the case was not handled quickly or expeditiously.

Lennon's accuser played on the hockey team at Cardinal Hayes in the mid-1970s, when Lennon was in charge of athletics. The man alleged that Lennon fondled him on weekend trips.

For months, supporters of Lennon protested his removal. Some doubted the credibility of Lennon's accuser. But things have been quiet for some time now.

Lennon is said to be living in Maine.