

Despite allegations, suspended priest thrives as family therapist

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PHILADELPHIA — After the Roman Catholic Diocese of Camden removed Edward Igle from active ministry in 2000 over an allegation of sexual abuse, he turned to his second career: family counseling.

Licensed as a therapist since the 1980s, the suspended priest runs a South Jersey practice, counseling families and children, and teaches related classes through a Philadelphia-based center, including on how to identify and clinically treat victims of sex abuse.

In 2011, church officials told New Jersey regulators about two men who claimed that Igle abused them in the 1970s. The diocese deemed both claims credible, a spokesman said, but too late under the statute of limitations to lead to prosecution.

The state has repeatedly renewed Igle's licenses.

In interviews this month, Igle, 68, denied any misconduct. He called "inaccurate" any suggestion that the first abuse allegation forced him from ministry.

"I have never sexually abused anyone in my life," he said last week at his Vineland family and marriage counseling practice, the Center for Relational Counseling.

He said that although he counsels children, he never meets alone with them. And when he teaches professionals about sex abuse, among other topics, he said he sometimes mentions that he was once accused of abuse.

He also said the diocese never informed him of a second allegation or that the first allegation was deemed credible.

A lawyer for the diocese said church officials did not know what had happened to Igle after they reported the claims to state licensing regulators.

Marion Lindblad-Goldberg, Igle's boss at the Philadelphia Child and Family Therapy Training Center, said Igle disclosed the sex-abuse allegation and said it was untrue. She said she believes him.

In an interview this year, she said he teaches postgraduate professionals on topics that include parental advice and dealing with sex abuse, and is among the best teachers she knows. Many of the center's courses, Igle and Lindblad-Goldberg said, center on treating trauma.

Since the clergy sex-abuse scandal erupted, many churches have sought to be more open about affected clergy.

The Philadelphia Archdiocese and the Diocese of Wilmington post on their websites the names of priests who have been credibly accused of and removed for sexual abuse or misconduct. Philadelphia also includes photos.

The Diocese of Allentown doesn't provide information about credibly accused priests on its website, but has a "Youth Protection" section on diocesan policy regarding sexual abuse, including contact information for victims'

assistance coordinators and phone numbers for children and youth services offices in the five counties of the diocese, where suspected abuse can be reported.

Since 2012, the diocese has prohibited anyone under 18 from being employed in rectories, parish offices or priests' residences. It also bars minors from being admitted to those places unless they are accompanied by adults who aren't clergy. Additionally, one-on-one pastoral care of children must be carried out in meeting spaces clearly visible to another staff member.

"If a diocese is serious about protecting children and families, they need to convey on their website that they have removed a priest because they believe their victims," said Anne Barrett Doyle, a director of BishopAccountability.org, an advocacy group that maintains an online database of abuse allegations. "Their names need to be in the public domain."

In the early 2000s, the Camden Diocese found itself entrenched in the sex-abuse scandal. Sued multiple times over allegations involving dozens of priests, it paid out several million dollars in settlements.

In 2011, a man writing in a Richmond, Va., Catholic newspaper identified himself as one of the recipients.

In his account in the Catholic Virginian, the man, who identified himself only as "George," detailed abuse he said he had suffered decades earlier at the hands of a priest at St. John Vianney parish in Deptford.

"I trusted this man with my life, and he abused his priesthood," the alleged victim wrote. "That man ruined my life."

He also wrote that the Camden Diocese had paid him a settlement, which he did not disclose.

The article did not name the accused priest. But Peter Feuerherd, then the diocesan spokesman, confirmed it was Igle. Igle was ordained in 1974 and worked during that decade in South Jersey parishes. He later served in other roles for the diocese, including as clinical director for Catholic Charities' counseling program.

George's claim was the second against him.

In the first, in 1994, a West Berlin man sued Igle, alleging the priest abused and raped him over several years in the 1970s, starting when he was 14.

That man first detailed his claim in a 2005 interview with The Philadelphia Inquirer. He has since died. (The newspaper does not identify alleged child sex-abuse victims.)

In an interview last month, the man's mother said her son, a former altar boy, never recovered.

"At the time, we didn't know what was going on," she said. "We had Igle bless our marriage. We knew him."

The suit was settled in 2000 for \$7,500, and included a stipulation that Igle take a two-year leave of absence from the diocese, court documents show. Igle later applied to return, a lawyer for the church said, but was denied.

In the interview last week, Igle said the leave was "for personal reasons." He declined to elaborate.

Igle has been licensed as a marriage and family therapist since 1982 and as a clinical social worker since 1994.

Morning Call reporter Dan Sheehan contributed to this report.

