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Former Pastor From Archbishop Myer's Time In Peoria Recalls Similar Abuse Allegations





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As calls for the resignation of Newark Archbishop John Myers grow louder, the former rector and pastor of the Catholic Diocese of Peoria, Ill. is now coming forward to shed some light on Newark Archbishop John Myer's early years as a young priest. Rev. Patrick Collins spoke to NJ Today Managing Editor Mike Schneider about disturbing reports of

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sexual misconduct by a priest that went unheeded during the time Myers was coadjutor bishop in Peoria.



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“[Archbishop Myers] and I were young priests together in the Peoria diocese,” Collins said. “When I became rector of the cathedral in 1987, about a week later he became the coadjutor bishop and lived in the cathedral rectory. So we were together there about three years.”

During that time, said Collins, he had received reports of a particular priest’s sexual misbehavior, which he took to the then Bishop of Peoria — Edward O’Rourke. According to Collins, O’Rourke told him that he and then coadjutor bishop John Myers were aware of the allegations and handling the situation.

“I went to Bishop O’Rourke, he thanked me, told me I’d done the right thing, that he would take care of it. Within a day or two, I noticed that the priest, who was living in that cathedral rectory by the way, stopped speaking to me, so I assumed he’d been talked to.”

Collins said he also received a letter from a mother detailing allegations of sexual abuse committed against her son. “I had gotten a letter signed by the mother of a gay son who detailed things that this priest was doing with her son, age unspecified, and wanted me to intervene.”

Collins said he took the letter to O’Rourke and was assured again that the situation was being dealt with. But a week later, he said the priest in question was promoted to a high-level position within the diocese.

“So I thought either you don’t believe me or you don’t care. and at that point I sought to begin to move on and leave the position at the cathedral and the diocese,” he said.

As for the priest at the center of those allegations, Collins said he was moved several times to three different

assignments before he finally left the diocese and was dismissed from the priesthood. Collins said he later learned that that priest had committed other improprieties involving both adults and children. There was one family, he said, that came to him with allegations of abuse against their son.

“But when I encouraged this family to come forward to Bishop Myers with this information, like so many families that get involved in this sort of thing, they didn’t want to be involved,” said Collins. “They didn’t want to be publicly named, so none of that information would come forward.”

When he read the recent headlines about Father Mike Fugee and the Newark Archdiocese, Collins said he experienced déjà vu of those early years in Peoria.

“This certainly resembles what I remember from the cathedral back in the late 1980s. I left that assignment in 1990. So we’re talking about 1987 to 1990.”

While he refrained from offering advice on how Archbishop Myers should respond to the current controversy, Collins said it would be a good sign if Myers spoke more directly and openly rather than through spokesman Jim Goodness.

“If there is something to this mishandling of the case, I would think he would have a hard time functioning, but I would leave it up to higher authority to decide what’s the best way to handle whether he should move on [or] stay and try to repair the damage.”

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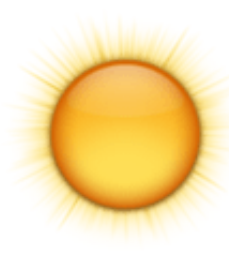


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