

Allentown Diocese clears priest after finding abuse allegation erroneous



Monsignor Edward Sacks in this file photo from 2014. (File photo / THE MORNING CALL)



By **Tim Darragh**
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Monsignor Edward Sacks, a longtime Allentown Diocese educator and church leader removed from ministry last month after being named as an alleged sexual abuser, was cleared of the charge, the diocese said in a statement Thursday.

Sacks, who was the pastor at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Bethlehem Township until the accusation was made Sept. 14, has returned to ministry, it said.

The statement said the person who reported Sacks made “an erroneous allegation.”

As of Thursday, Sacks had not returned to the church but will be presiding over the 9 a.m. Mass on Sunday with Bishop Alfred Schlert, a church secretary said.

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The person who made the allegation has since said the accusation was made in error. [He] confirmed that he was not abused by any member of the clergy.

— Diocese of Allentown

He is the second Allentown Diocese priest falsely accused of sexual misconduct in the weeks since the release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report naming 301 priests as having abused more than 1,000 children over a period of decades. Sacks was not named in the report.

Under diocesan policy, Schlert removed Sacks from ministry when he learned of the allegation. According to a message in the parish bulletin last month, Sacks said his suspension was based on an allegation by the mother of a student from the former Holy Name High School in Reading. Sacks was vice principal there from 1965-68 and principal from 1974-79.

“I am absolutely convinced I can prove my innocence,” Sacks said in the statement. “It is a case of mistaken identity.”

The diocese said the allegation was retracted.

“The person who made the allegation has since said the accusation was made in error,” it said. “The alleged victim confirmed that he was not abused by any member of the clergy.”

Berks County District Attorney John T. Adams reviewed the allegation, the diocese said, deciding against conducting an investigation because it was barred by the statute of limitations.

The diocese explored the allegation through an investigative firm, which presented its findings to an independent review board, the diocese said. The board, which includes a family doctor with expertise in examining children who have been sexually abused, a county Children and Youth Services caseworker, a federal probation officer and the director of the Bureau of Offender Reentry of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, unanimously recommended reinstating Sacks, it said.

Sacks, 80, was ordained in 1964 and served mostly in high schools. In addition to Holy Name, he was principal of Marian Catholic High School in Rush Township, Schuylkill County. He has been pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help since 1988.

After the release of the grand jury report covering six Pennsylvania dioceses, including Allentown, someone alleged the Rev. David Gillis had abused his daughter. Gillis, an Allentown Diocese priest serving a parish in Florida, had his ministry reinstated last month when the accusation proved false.

A hotline established by state Attorney General Josh Shapiro for clergy sex abuse complaints received more than 1,100 calls as of last week, he said.

Concerns about abuse in the church or elsewhere can be reported to the state ChildLine at 800-932-0313; the attorney general’s hotline at 888-538-8541; or to local law enforcement.

tdarragh@mcall.com

Twitter @tmdarragh

610-820-6691