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## Orange Diocese Gives Details on Sex Abuse

Documents show how officials covered for, transferred and even promoted pedophiles.

By WILLIAM LOBDELL  
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*Times Staff Writers*

For more than two decades, officials in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange covered up for priests who molested children, shuffling predators from parish to parish and diocese to diocese, protecting them from prosecution and failing to warn parishioners of the danger, according to church documents released Tuesday.

More than 10,000 pages of letters, handwritten notes, memos and other documents detailing church actions were released from the personnel files of 15 priests and teachers as part of a court-approved \$100-million settlement reached in December between the Orange Diocese and 90 alleged molestation victims. A judge ruled, however, that he was "powerless" to order the release of files on eight other priests and teachers.

According to the newly released documents, church officials dumped one serial molester in Tijuana. They welcomed a convicted child abuser from another state into their diocese, even though they knew he faced a new allegation. When he was

accused once again, they sent him to a New Mexico rehabilitation center with a notation: "No one else will take you." And they offered a repeat abuser up to \$19,000 to leave the priesthood quietly.

Even as they coddled abusive priests, church officials stonewalled and ostracized victims' families, the documents show.

"It is hard to believe that our spiritual leaders would knowingly sacrifice lives of innocent children . . . to keep up the façade and [live] a lie," a woman wrote in a 1986 letter to Diocesan Administrator John T. Steinbock, now bishop of Fresno, after learning that Andrew Christian Andersen, a Huntington Beach

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# Orange Diocese Shares Secrets

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priest who allegedly molested her son in 1983, had gone on to sexually abuse three more boys.

"How many more innocent children does he have to molest before something is done about this sick man!" she wrote.

The pattern of deception involved two bishops of Orange — William R. Johnson, now deceased, and Norman F. McFarland, who retired in 1998 — and Auxiliary Bishop Michael P. Driscoll, now bishop of Boise. It also involved Msgr. John Urell, then a top diocesan official and now pastor of St. Norbert Church in Orange.

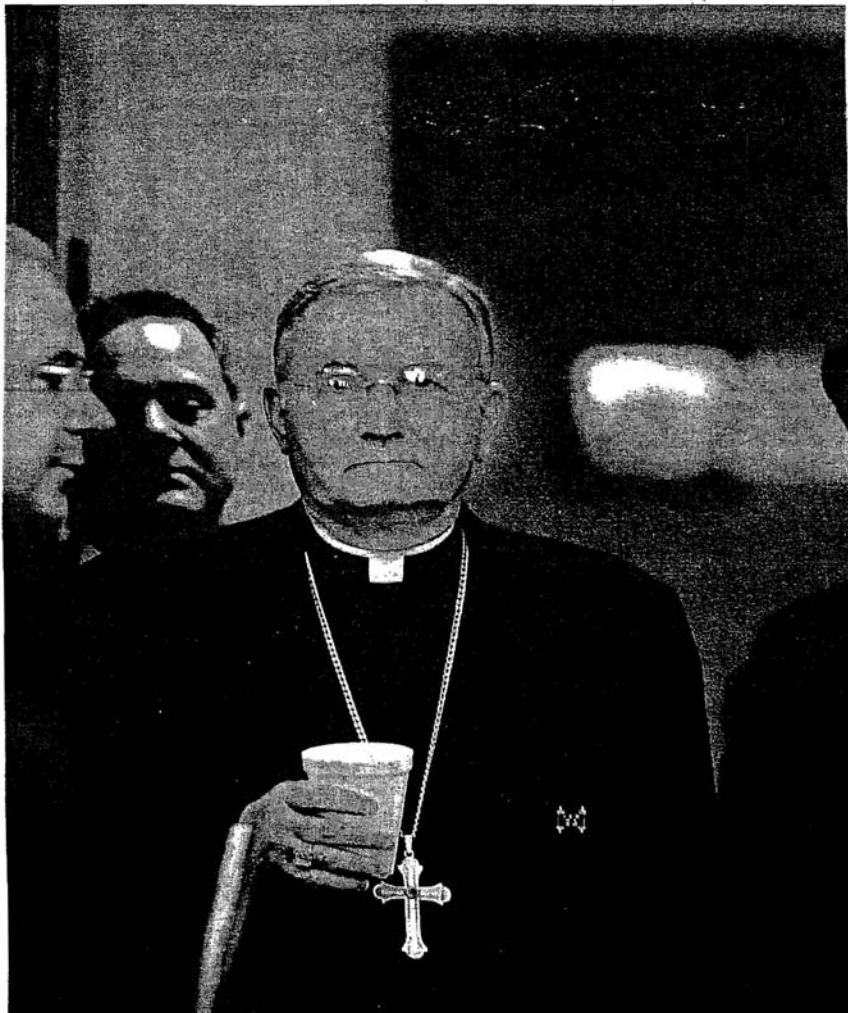
Bishops in Milwaukee; Baker, Ore.; and Tijuana helped the Orange Diocese shuffle molesting priests around, according to the documents. And an archbishop from Panama who was working in Orange County intimidated an alleged victim's family so they would not contact police, according to a mother's letter.

Driscoll, who handled allegations of clergy sexual misconduct under both Johnson and McFarland, took the unusual step this month of issuing an apology in anticipation of documents revealing his role in the Orange County scandal. "I am deeply sorry that the way we handled cases at that time allowed children to be victimized by permitting some priests to remain in ministry, for not disclosing their behavior to those who might be at risk, and for not monitoring their actions more closely," he said in a statement posted on a Boise diocesan website.

Driscoll declined to comment further. McFarland and Urell couldn't be reached for comment Tuesday.

"I would say Bishop Driscoll's a sick, immoral person to allow something like this to take place," said David Guerrero, 37, of Palm Springs, who was allegedly abused beginning at age 8 by Father Siegfried Widera, who was already convicted of molestation when he joined the Orange Diocese. Guerrero said he received "several million" in the settlement. "And now he's the bishop of Boise? It's disgusting."

The culture of shielding predator priests and ignoring victims' complaints in Orange closely parallels that of other dioceses where church personnel files have been made public.



**BISHOP OF ORANGE:** *Tod D. Brown arrives Tuesday for a news conference on release of documents showing how knowledge of pedophile priests was suppressed.*

The release of confidential priest personnel files in Boston triggered the eruption of the church's national sexual abuse scandal three years ago. The disclosures led to the resignation of Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston as archbishop, thousands of lawsuits across the nation, and a series of reforms enacted by U.S. bishops.

In California, nearly 1,000 claims were filed under a 2003 state law that suspended the statute of limitations for one year to allow plaintiffs to sue institutions that failed to protect children from sexual abuse.

So far, Bishop of Orange Tod D. Brown is the only California prelate to resolve all of his diocese's sexual abuse claims and make public some of his priests' personnel files without a court order. But files were released for only about one-third of the 44 diocesan employees accused of wrongdoing — 31 priests, 10 educators, two nuns and one brother.

Files for some of the accused were not released because they were not part of the December settlement, because they belonged to other dioceses or religious orders, or because they objected.

On Tuesday, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Peter D. Lichtman said he had no jurisdiction to release the files for those who objected because the lawsuits had been settled.

"Only the most naive believe these files are complete," said Mary Grant, regional director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

While Brown has been known as a reformer on the issue of abusive clergy, the documents show he failed that same year to inform parishioners of all the allegations against two priests. Brown said he was unaware of previous allegations in one of the cases.

"With these documents in the hands of those who have suffered, it is another step on the path to healing and reconciliation," Brown said. "The settlement with the victim-survivors wasn't just about the financial payments. It was about taking moral responsibility for the sins of the past that have caused their suffering and pain."

With the release of the Orange documents, the spotlight returns to Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, who has been fighting for two years to keep similar papers secret.

The senior U.S. cardinal, whose archdiocese faces lawsuits from 544 parishioners, has argued that any communication between a bishop and his priest should be off-limits to secular au-

thorities, lawyers and alleged victims.

Unlike Brown, who became bishop in 1998, after most of the alleged sexual abuse took place, Mahony, appointed in 1985, presided over a period when many priests in Los Angeles were accused of molesting children, Mahony has admitted "mistakes" in how he handled accusations against his priests.

The most revealing documents in Orange County center on five priests, including three of the diocese's most notorious predators: Siegfried Widera, Eleuterio "Al" Ramos and Andrew Christian Andersen. Files on two other priests, Franklin Bückman and Michael Pecharich, show how diocesan officials downplayed allegations and were slow to respond to complaints.

According to the files:

### Siegfried Widera

Most of Widera's story has been well-documented. Church officials in Orange conceded in 2002 that they accepted the Milwaukee priest into their diocese in 1977 despite a vague warning in a letter from then-Archbishop William E. Cousins of Milwaukee that in earlier years Widera had a "moral problem having to do with a boy in school." In fact, he had already been convicted in 1973 of molesting a boy.

In 1985, after an allegation of sexual abuse in Orange County surfaced, church officials barred Widera from performing priestly duties. He was then sent to a Catholic rehabilitation center in New Mexico for treatment, which he never completed. He later became a Tucson businessman.

In 2002, when the church's national sex abuse scandal exploded, other Widera victims came forward and authorities charged him with 42 counts of molestation in Orange County and Milwaukee.

That same year, Widera became a fugitive and spent a year on the run, mostly in Mexico. In 2003, Mexican authorities cornered him in Mazatlan and he leapt to his death from a third-floor hotel window. He was 62.

According to the newly released documents, what Cousins actually wrote Driscoll was not only that Widera had a "moral problem having to do with a boy in school," but also that he had a



**WIDERA:** *The Orange Diocese accepted the priest from Milwaukee despite his known predilections.*



**ANDERSEN:** *He received no prison time for 26 felony counts. Diocesan officials had downplayed allegations.*



**PECHARICH:** *Having admitted to the previous bishop that he had molested, he continued as a parish pastor.*



**BUCKMAN:** *Accused of misconduct, he quit as pastor and transferred to Oregon with a glowing recommendation.*

## Serial offenses, serial transfers

The late Father Eleuterio "Al" Ramos admitted molesting at least 25 boys. He was transferred numerous times after allegations surfaced and ended up in Tijuana. Here is a look at when he began his service at various parishes, and allegations against him:

1966 St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Los Angeles ①

1971 St. Marianne Parish in Pico Rivera ②

1973 Resurrection Parish in Los Angeles ③

1975 The district attorney reviews an unspecified allegation.

1975 St. Joseph Parish in Placentia ④

1979 Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Santa Ana; accused of inappropriate behavior ⑤

1980 St. Angela Merici Parish

in Brea ⑥

1982 Allegation of molestation

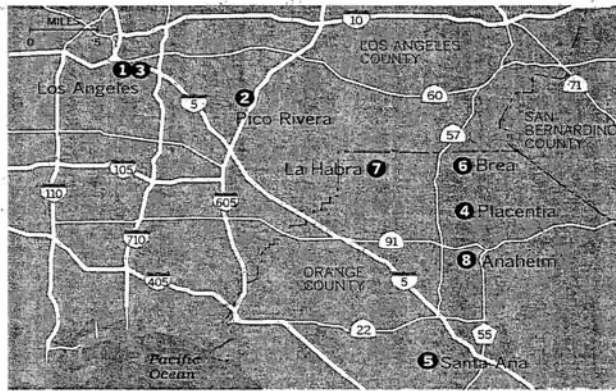
1983 Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in La Habra ⑦

1984 St. Anthony Claret Parish in Anaheim ⑧

1985 Admits "slip" with a boy and is transferred to Tijuana

1993, 1994 Lawsuits allege molestation of two boys

2003 Lawsuits allege participation in a 1984 gang rape and continued molestation of an Orange County boy



Sources: Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange, ESRI, GDT

Los Angeles Times

more recent "repetition" and needed to leave the state for legal reasons.

"From all the professional information I can gather, there would seem no great risk in allowing this man to return to pastoral work but there are legal complications at present writing," Cousins wrote. "Incidentally, these legal technicalities would permit Father's going to another state as long as treatment is continued."

### Eleuterio "Al" Ramos

In 1993 and 1994, two lawsuits were filed against the Orange Diocese and Ramos, alleging that the priest had molested two

boys. The suit said Ramos gave both boys alcohol, showed them adult movies and magazines, and molested them.

Ramos admitted in court documents to molesting several boys and taking nude photos of them.

The priest was sent to a rehabilitation center in Massachusetts, then returned to the diocese.

Church officials in Orange said he was transferred to Tijuana in 1985.

According to a lawsuit filed in 2003, Ramos and three other men gang-raped a boy in a San Diego hotel room in 1984. Another suit filed in 2003 alleged that Ramos continued to molest

at least one Orange County boy who visited him after the priest left the Orange Diocese.

Ramos told police in 2003 that he had had sex with or fondled at least 25 boys. He died in 2004, at age 64.

The church documents on Ramos released Tuesday provide substantially more detail. Four complaints over nine years were lodged against Ramos before Driscoll sought to transfer him to the Diocese of Tijuana, the documents show.

In 1975, Ramos underwent "psychological care" that was "suggested by the district attorney as a result of a recent incident," according to an internal memo. At the same time, he was moved from Resurrection Catholic Church in Los Angeles to St. Joseph Church in Placentia.

In November 1979, a teacher at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Santa Ana, where Ramos had been transferred next, asked then-Bishop Johnson in a handwritten letter for a meeting about a "very grave school matter." Notes scribbled at the bottom of the letter say, "Boys taken to rectory. Some drinking. Boys to movies. Not approved for children."

Shortly afterward, a letter from Johnson informed Ramos' pastor that the priest would be entering St. Luke's Institute in Holliston, Mass., a rehabilitation center for Catholic priests.

While Ramos was in treatment, Johnson praised him in a 1980 letter to a parishioner as a "fine priest, zealous and generous hearted."

When Ramos returned from St. Luke's, records show, he was reassigned to a new parish, St. Angela Merici in Brea.

In 1982, Ramos was accused of molesting another boy, documents show. He was ordered to take two weeks' vacation and undergo additional counseling. The next year, he was transferred to Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in La Habra.

In 1984, he was promoted to pastor of his own parish, St. Anthony Claret in Anaheim — the same year for which he was accused of gang-raping the boy in San Diego.

In 1985, Ramos told an unnamed church official that he had a "slip" with a 17-year-old boy, according to notes of that telephone conversation. Driscoll

arranged for Ramos' transfer that year to the Diocese of Tijuana, documents show.

Tijuana Bishop Emilio Bertie accepted the priest after Driscoll detailed in a letter some, but not all, of the allegations in Ramos' file. Driscoll also withheld key details about the 1982 allegations, saying only that the priest was accused of showing adult movies and "girlie magazines" to a boy.

Driscoll's notes from the 1982 meeting with the alleged victim's parents reveal more.

"Motel. Unbutton shirt. Pull string on pants. Hold hand. Try to touch crotch. Wanted out."

While Ramos was in Tijuana, the documents show the Orange Diocese provided him with a car, car insurance and a monthly stipend. Church officials wrote off \$73,616.11 that Ramos owed the diocese, according to a 1994 memo to then-Bishop McFarland.

Several letters in the priest files show parishioners' and teachers' frustration with the church's inaction on the serial pedophile.

"I was one of the people from [the school] who went to the bishop to demand [Ramos'] removal," a faculty member wrote to the mother of a Ramos victim. "It wasn't until one of our teachers telephoned Msgr. Driscoll and said if he wasn't removed and placed under treatment by the first of that week, she would have him charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor" and then the diocese moved."

### Andrew Christian Andersen

It previously had been reported that Andersen was accused in 1983 of molesting a boy. Then-Bishop Johnson ordered him into therapy, but he remained at his Huntington Beach parish, St. Bonaventure, and in charge of the altar boys.

Three years later, the priest faced up to 56 years in state prison after being convicted of 26 felony counts of child molestation, according to court documents.

The judge gave Andersen no prison time and instead ordered him to enter a Catholic rehabilitation center in New Mexico. Four years later, in 1990, Andersen was arrested in Albuquerque on suspicion of trying to sodomize a 14-year-old boy, and was ordered to serve six years in prison for violating his probation in the California case.

Tuesday's release of documents added new details. A 1986 evaluation of Andersen by Kenneth Fineman, a consulting psychologist for the diocese, reported that "in the parish, fantasies involving young boys occupied 50% of his fantasy life" and that "incarceration would not be an effective deterrent for this man."

George Niederauer, Andersen's spiritual director at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo and now bishop of Salt Lake City, wrote to Luis A. Cardenas, an Orange County Superior Court judge at the time, and pleaded for leniency.

Andersen "might well have misjudged what was appropriate physical expression especially given the atmosphere of adult-child contacts in our society at present," wrote Niederauer, adding that the boys might have misconstrued "wrestling" or "horse play" as sexual abuse.

Jaime Soto, now auxiliary bishop of Orange, also wrote to the judge, downplaying Andersen's crimes.

"Our work brings us into intimate contact with people's lives," he wrote. "In a time when the exchange of simple affection within the most intimate of circles has become a rare commodity, our associations with others run the grave risk of being misunderstood by all parties including perhaps the priest himself."

Soto and Niederauer couldn't be reached for comment.

The documents also described how Urell and Driscoll devised a plan in 1994 to pay Andersen between \$9,000 and \$19,000 to quietly leave the priesthood, according to correspondence between church officials.

"If [Andersen] refuses to get going with the laicization process, he receives none of this," Urell wrote to Driscoll.

Andersen was defrocked and his whereabouts are unknown. He is 53.

### Michael Pecharich

Bishop Brown removed Pecharich from ministry in 2002 as part of a court-ordered "zero-tolerance" policy, permitting the priest to tell parishioners that he had "transgressed the personal boundaries of an adolescent" 19 years before. Church officials said Pecharich admitted to then-Bishop McFarland in 1996 that he had sexually abused the minor, but was allowed to continue as pastor of San Francisco Solano Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, across the street from Santa Margarita High School.

According to Pecharich's file, there were several other allegations of inappropriate conduct.

In 1993, a woman had complained to Urell that the priest, while at St. Bridget of Sweden in Van Nuys sometime before 1976, had hugged her son too long. She also reported that other boys said the priest had invited them to sleep in his bed.

According to his notes from the meeting, Urell said he needed to interview her son to verify the complaint. The meeting apparently never happened, and Urell wrote that he would not confront the priest because he had no direct complaint, nor were "any actions alleged."

In 1995, a Jesuit seminarian told Urell in a letter and at a meeting that when he was 15 or 16 years old, Pecharich had locked him in a counseling room at San Antonio de Padua Catholic Church in Anaheim and given him five-minute hugs and kisses.

The next year, another woman wrote to complain that Pecharich had pulled hair from her son's leg and told him to put it on his chest.

She also wrote that she saw Pecharich put his hands inside a boy's pockets, telling the boy he needed to go to the "butt store" and to get "more hips."

In 1996, a man told then-Bishop McFarland and Urell that Pecharich had repeatedly molested him 12 years earlier, on a camping trip, while skiing, at the rectory and in a Wrightwood cabin, according to a letter and notes from a meeting between the victim and Urell.

Pecharich, 59, remains a priest but is barred from ministry. His whereabouts are unknown.

### Franklin Buckman

In 1984, Buckman resigned as pastor of one of the largest parishes in the diocese, St. Polycarp's in Stanton. In a statement to parishioners, he said that "the burden of administration has become much more a trial to me... After a period of rest I would hope to minister in a smaller parish setting."

The Orange Diocese last year revealed that Buckman had been accused of sexual misconduct.

According to the documents released Tuesday, Buckman was transferred to a diocese in Baker, Ore., which covers the eastern two-thirds of the state, after he was accused of sexual abuse.

Driscoll had written a glowing letter of recommendation.

"He will be a blessing to you and your diocese," Driscoll wrote, "and he is always welcome to 'come home' with us."

In February 1989, a mother of eight asked Driscoll to investigate Buckman's alleged molestation of her son, while he was still an Orange County priest.

With the investigation dragging on 15 months later, the mother appealed to Pope John Paul II.

In a letter composed in Spanish, the mother complained that Tomas Clavel, the retired archbishop of Panama, had "intimidated" her from making a police report. Clavel was then working in the Orange Diocese, but has since died.

"Not to say anything publicly. Everything was hushed up," the mother wrote. "I am asking you, I am begging you to do justice," she told the pope. "Please answer me so I will know that there



ALEXANDER GALLARDO, Los Angeles Times

### Michael P. Driscoll

As a top aide to two Orange County bishops, Michael P. Driscoll, above:

- Helped keep several known pedophile priests in ministry.
- Accepted a convicted sex offender into the diocese.
- Arranged for a serial pedophile to be transferred to Tijuana.

Driscoll, now bishop of Boise, issued an apology this month for his actions.

## Excerpts: secrecy and outrage

Newly released documents show that officials in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange covered up for some pedophile priests. Excerpts from the priests' files:

### Father Eleuterio "Al" Ramos

**March 27, 1975. An Archdiocese of Los Angeles memo on Ramos' psychological treatment:**

"This care was suggested by the district attorney as a result of a recent incident."

**Undated. Notes from Father Michael Driscoll, then chancellor of the Diocese of Orange (now bishop of Boise, Idaho), on Ramos' abuse report:**

"Obscene words-gestures. Bad judgment-immature acts. Offered boys drinks (alcoholic). Boys out late at night."

**April 15, 1980. Letter from Bishop William R. Johnson to a parishioner:**

Ramos "truly is a fine priest, zealous and generous hearted. . . . He will be returning to the diocese early next month and we look forward to having him back with us."

**1982. Driscoll note on another Ramos abuse report:**

"3 mos ago; motel; mag. -homosexual; this weekend; wrestling . . . playboy book; hustler; 'men-men'; motel; unbutton shirt; pull string on pants; one bed in room, stay overnight; went to movie - drive-in; hold hand; try to touch crotch, wanted out - got out of car, and went home by 2:00."

**July 24, 1985. Handwritten note from an unnamed church official:**

"Phone call from Al - wanted to report that he had 'slipped' and had an incident with a 17 yr. old boy from parish."

**July 26, 1985. Handwritten note from the same church official:**

"Al said parents not going legal. . . . Al leaving parish (vacation) immediately - medical doctor prescribes rest as he is exhausted for at least two weeks." Two months later, Ramos was transferred to the Diocese of Tijuana.

**Nov. 6, 1985. Letter from Bishop Johnson to Ramos in Tijuana:**

"I hope you will find your time in Tijuana a fulfilling time, and even though you are living apart from us, you still belong to us."

**April 15, 1991. Teacher at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Santa Ana writes to the mother of an alleged Ramos victim:**

"[I am] enraged at the Diocese of Orange or any diocese or order that refuses to take strong and immediate action when any [priest] has any of these problems. And how sad it is that it's only with the bravery and the pain of people like your [son] that will

force them to take action. . . . We tried our hardest to prevent what happened to boys like [your son], not knowing we were too late."

### Father Siegfried Widera

**Dec. 20, 1976. Letter from Archbishop of Milwaukee William E. Cousins to Driscoll:**

"In his earlier years there was a moral problem having to do with a boy in school. . . . More recently, however, there has been a repetition, and according to our state laws, further psychiatric treatment is mandated with the strong recommendation that no immediate assignment be made in the environs of the archdiocese."

"There would seem no great risk in allowing this man to return to pastoral work, but there are legal complications at present writing. Incidentally, these legal technicalities would permit Father's going to another state as long as treatment is continued."

### Father Andrew Christian "Chris" Andersen

**April 29, 1986. Notes from a Huntington Beach police detective who interviewed Driscoll as part of an investigation into allegations that Andersen abused three boys in 1985:**

"He said he couldn't remember if he destroyed the letter [written in 1983 by the mother of an alleged victim] or sent it back [to the pastor at the parish]. "I asked him if he recalled what the letter said. He said . . . it mentioned something about Father Chris hugging the boy and making body contact with him. He said he couldn't remember much more than that. "I then refreshed Father Driscoll's memory by stating . . . Father Chris took [the victim's] legs and placed them on his lap and began to rub his bare legs and came close to his crotch area. Father Driscoll said yes, that he recalled that part of the letter."

**Sept. 25, 1986. Letter from the mother of an alleged Andersen victim to Auxiliary Bishop John T. Steinbock (now bishop of Fresno):**

"... not even his association with altar boys [was] curtailed. . . . We left the church feeling we were the ones being persecuted, not the guilty one. . . . Since no one has tried to contact us from our own parish or the diocese, again showing no compassion or concern, I am writing this letter in hopes that if this situation ever comes to the attention of the church and/or diocese again, you will take a more sensitive and humane approach. . . ."

Source: Diocese of Orange priest personnel files

Los Angeles Times

is someone in the world who cares for the humble people."

Buckman, 67, was removed from ministry in Orange but is still a priest. Reached by phone Tuesday in Mesa, Ariz., where he

retired in 2002. Buckman said of the sexual abuse allegations, "That's not true, and I have nothing more to say about it."

He said he retired because "I was old enough." Asked why he

believes he was accused, Buckman said, "I don't know. I think money."

Times staff writers Anna Gorman and Larry B. Stammer contributed to this report.