

Philadelphia bishop suspended pending Episcopal trial: Charged with protecting accused sex offender

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The Episcopal bishop of Philadelphia has been barred from ministry pending a church trial to determine his culpability in protecting his brother, a former Episcopal priest who was accused of sexually abusing a minor in the 1970s.

Bishop Charles Bennison has been accused of “conduct unbecoming a member of the clergy” by an Episcopal Church committee and was barred from all ordained ministry by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori on October 31.

As rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Upland, California, in 1973, Bennison acted “passively and self-protectively” when his brother, John, a youth minister at the parish, was accused of having a sexual relationship with a 14-year-old female member of the youth group, according to the church committee.

John Bennison was married at the time, according to the committee’s presentment, or charge, against the bishop.

Charles Bennison failed to provide pastoral care to the girl, who was not identified by Episcopal News Service. Neither did he take steps to end the affair, report his brother to anyone, investigate whether his brother was abusing other children or tell the girl’s parents about the affair until three years had passed, according to the charges.

Later, Bennison did not prevent his brother’s ordination, his later request to be reinstated after renouncing his orders in 1977, or his transfer between two California dioceses, according to the Episcopal committee.

John Bennison was forced to leave the priesthood in 2006 when news of his abuse was made public, according to Episcopal News Service.

A trial date for Bishop Bennison was not immediately set. He will be paid in the meantime, ENS reported. *-Religion News Service*