

Judges Allegedly Breached Ethics by Keeping Company With Accused Felon

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New Jersey Law Journal

2013-09-25 03:08:11.0

Two New Jersey judges have been hit with ethics complaints for fraternizing with a government official indicted on corruption charges.

Judges Raymond Reddin and Gerald Keegan "created an appearance of impropriety that had the potential to weaken public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the Judiciary," the Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct alleges. [See formal complaints against [Keegan \(PDF\)](#) and [Reddin \(PDF\)](#).]

According to the ACJC, Reddin, a Passaic County Superior Court judge, and Keegan, a Paterson Municipal Court judge, are friends and fellow church congregants of Anthony Ardis, a former official of the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission. Ardis has known Reddin since childhood and Keegan for the past 25 years.

About 13 years ago, the three and numerous other parishioners of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Paterson formed Bartimaeus Family, a group focused on healing and dedicated to Monsignor Mark Giordani, who'd been diagnosed with cancer. They gathered every Thursday for dinner at a restaurant before evening mass. Giordani recovered but the group continued to meet. Attendance typically ranges from 15 to 30 people.

In June 2011, a state grand jury handed up an indictment against Ardis, who at the time was director of management services, board secretary and chief ethics liaison officer for the PVSC, a state agency that manages wastewater processing for four counties abutting the Passaic River.

Ardis, a former PVSC commissioner, was charged with official misconduct and other crimes for allegedly directing staff workers, while on the clock, to tear down sheetrock, do carpentry work and install a microwave at his mother's house, and replace air conditioning units at his girlfriend's house.

Also charged in the indictment were Kevin Keogh, superintendent for special services, and Chester Mazza, assistant superintendent for special services.

All three were terminated from the PVSC when charges were filed.

Reddin and Keegan continued to go to group meetings with Ardis even after the widely publicized indictment, according to the complaints.

The ACJC said attending the pre-service dinners violated Code of Judicial Conduct Canon 1 (requiring judges to observe high standards of conduct to preserve the integrity and independence of the judiciary); Canon 2A (requiring that they respect and comply with the law and act in a manner promoting public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary); and Canon 5A(2) (requiring that extrajudicial activities be conducted so as not to demean judicial office).

The fact that Reddin attended while sitting in the vicinage in which Ardis was charged was "a lapse of judgment" that "escalated the appearance of impropriety," the ACJC added.

Judge Reddin, through an assistant, deferred comment to his counsel — his son, Raymond B. Reddin of Piro, Zinna, Cifelli, Paris & Genitempo in Nutley.

"These are two very well-respected and dedicated judges," the younger Reddin says. "They belong to a church group that also includes a close childhood friend [Ardis]. ... There is no discussion of any legal matter whatsoever."

He declines to address whether Judge Reddin still attends the Thursday gatherings or was aware of the charges against Ardis.

Keegan, a Woodland Park solo and one of Paterson's four municipal judges, did not return a call to his law office Tuesday.

Reddin was a West Paterson solo from 1979 until his appointment to the bench in 2003 by Gov. James McGreevey.

In a 2005 *Law Journal* survey of practitioners, Judge Reddin tied for fourth among all Superior Court judges in the state. Reddin also was the highest rated jurist in Passaic County and led all Criminal Part judges.

Reddin didn't fare quite as well in a 2009 survey, ranking No. 8 among the 20 judges in the vicinage.

The charges against Ardis, the most serious of which are second-degree offenses, were still pending as of Tuesday, according to Attorney General's Office spokesman Peter Aseltine. A trial scheduled for this month was postponed and now is set for Dec. 2.

Last year, Keogh pleaded guilty to second-degree counts; Mazza, to a fourth-degree charge.

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