

Reverend Thomas J. Kerestus

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1942
YEAR OF DEATH:	2014
ORDINATION:	May 24, 1969

Employment/Assignment History

6/11/1969 – 10/27/1969	Assistant, Annunciation B.V.M., Shenandoah, PA
10/27/1969 – 1/6/1970	Regional Director, C.Y.O., Mid-Schuylkill County
1/6/1970 – 8/24/1970	Area Chaplain, Appalachian Trail Scouting Council Regional Director, Bishop's Overseas Aid, East Schuylkill County, PA
8/24/1970 – 6/18/1970	Assistant, St. Peter, Reading, PA
6/18/1970 – 7/8/1971	Assistant, Our Lady of Hungary, Northampton, PA
7/8/1971 – 11/4/1974	Regional Director, C.Y.O., Northampton County, PA
11/4/1974 – 9/9/1976	Assistant, Sacred Heart, W. Reading, PA
9/9/1976 – 12/15/1977	Assistant, St. Ambrose, Schuylkill Haven, PA Regional Director, C.Y.O. West Schuylkill County, PA
12/15/1977 – 2/25/1982	Pastor, St. Stephen of Hungary, Allentown, PA
2/25/1982 – 5/29/1986	Pastor, St. John Capistrano, Bethlehem, PA
5/29/1986 – 6/19/1986	Leave of Absence
6/19/1986 – 6/14/1990	Assistant Pastor, Sacred Heart, Allentown, PA
6/14/1990 – 7/27/1993	Chaplain, Sacred Heart Hospital, Allentown, PA
7/27/1993 – 3/1/2002	Resident, Holy Family Villa
3/1/2002 – 9/17/2014	Retired

Summary

Records of the Diocese of Allentown revealed that parishioners of St. John Capistrano in Bethlehem wrote multiple letters to Bishop Welsh between March 1985 and April 1986 informing him of their concern about Father Thomas Kerestus' relationship with a 16-year-old boy. The parishioners were aware that Kerestus would take the boy to and from school daily, had taken the boy on vacations to Canada, Florida, and the New Jersey shore. Kerestus also bought the boy new clothes, a videocassette recorder, an organ, a guitar, and music lessons, and paid for the boy's dental bills. Additionally, Kerestus bought new furniture for the boy's family. Parishioners purchased a vehicle for the church, which was taken control of by Kerestus, registered in his name, and essentially given to the boy to drive. Several parishioners reported that the boy spent nights at the rectory with Kerestus despite living only two blocks away. One parishioner wrote that Kerestus has become "very deeply involved emotionally" with the boy and Kerestus and the boy were "inseparable." The same parishioner wrote that Kerestus' behavior around the boy was "inappropriate—very childish, wrestling, indecent touching."

Summary

Another parishioner wrote that Kerestus drank heavily and “*I think he gets drunk because he is hiding a problem.*” A different parishioner called the parish office and reported, “*I see him [Kerestus] go after that kids balls. Forgive my language. This happened last year when we were in church decorating and cleaning up.*” Kerestus later admitted to the indecent touching of the boy while at Jemez Springs Center in New Mexico.

The Diocese also produced very limited documents on another victim of Kerestus. In October 1992, the second victim called St. Ann’s Rectory in Emmaus, Lehigh County, asking to speak with Monsignor Hoban, but spoke with Father Brennan. Father Coyle wrote a memorandum to Bishop Welsh summarizing the phone call to Brennan. The second victim reported that he had been sexually abused by Kerestus for five years. He was eighteen at the time of the report. Kerestus was a friend of the second victim’s family. In the memorandum summarizing the phone call, Coyle wrote that the victim “*spoke in detail about the relationship*” and that the victim “*sounded disturbed.*” During the phone call, the victim mentioned he had witnesses to the abuse. The victim was given a phone number and advised to call Monsignor Muntone. The memorandum provided no further details. The Diocese provided a news article from the Allentown Morning Call detailing the arrest and troubled past of the second victim. The second victim attempted to kill his parents in a house fire and threatened to shoot himself in 1990, threatened to jump off his roof in 1992, and was arrested for statutory rape of a thirteen-year-old girl, also in 1992. Diocesan records show that Kerestus began receiving his retirement in March 2002.

The Diocese also provided a one page memorandum, dated June 16, 2005, from Thomas Dugan, Administrator of St. John Vianney Center, to Gobitas. In the memorandum, Dugan wrote, “*Based on the results of a risk assessment, Father Thomas Kerestus’ degree of risk for sexual re-offense was estimated in the moderate-high range.*” Dugan added:

He was defensive on testing and does not take full accountability for his offense behaviors. He shows little contrition for his actions. Test results suggest he has attributes and behaviors very highly similar to those of known sex offenders and the condition of sexual deviance may be a component of his personality make-up.

Kerestus remained on retirement status until his death in 2014.

In April 2016, a third victim came forward to report sexual abuse by Kerestus. The third victim reported that Kerestus abused him beginning when he was fifteen years old. The abuse occurred from 1975 to 1980, while the victim was a student at Holy Name High School in West Reading.