

Reverend David A. Soderlund

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1938
YEAR OF DEATH:	N/A
ORDINATION:	May 22, 1965

Employment/Assignment History

6/1965 – 12/1966	St. Peter, Coplay, PA
12/1966 – 4/1971	Sacred Heart, West Reading, PA
4/1971 – 6/1973	St. Catharine of Siena, Reading, PA
4/1971 – 6/1974	Holy Name High School, Reading, PA
6/1971 – 11/1971	St. Catharine of Siena, Reading, PA
10/1971 – 11/1978	Adult Religious Education, Berks County, PA
6/1973 – 1/1974	St. John the Baptist, Shillington, PA
1/1974 – 11/1978	St. Benedict, Reading, PA
6/1974 – 11/1978	Holy Name High School, Reading, PA
11/1978 – 7/1980	St. Joseph, Summit Hill, PA
7/1980 – 9/1980	Sick Leave (Villa St. John Vianney Hospital)
9/1980 – 6/1981	Our Lady of Hungary, Northampton, PA
6/1981	St. Catharine of Siena, Reading, PA
10/1986 – 1/1989	Good Samaritan Hospital, Pottsville, PA
2/1989	Administrative Leave (faculties withdrawn)
5/2005	Dismissed from Priesthood
2009	Arrested

Summary

As early as August 5, 1961, while in Seminary, Father David Soderlund expressed a desire to work with children. In 1980, three separate complaints were made against him. The complaints asserted that Soderlund had engaged in sexual acts with three different children. The children were aged 12 to 13 years old. The Diocesan record, a “*summary of case*” relating to Soderlund, generalized the sexual conduct without referencing specific acts or crimes.

On June 11, 1980, a meeting was held at the Chancery during which photo albums were examined depicting nude photographs of a young boy engaged in sex acts with Soderlund. Soderlund appeared in the photographs unclothed with the boy. After the meeting, Monsignor Anthony Muntone went to the rectory and completed a search. Muntone located a second photo album of another young boy and negatives of the first young boy, along with “*other pornographic materials*.” Father James Gaffney was present at the parish at the time of the search. Gaffney testified before the Grand Jury and recalled the child pornography being removed from the church by Muntone.

Summary

On June 29, 1980, Soderlund admitted to Chancery officials that he engaged in sexual activity with the three young boys. While documents created at the time of the admission minimized the conduct, the facts became available through a detailed account of the abuse obtained from a victim in 1997 by the Diocese. That account was obtained by the Grand Jury from within the secret or confidential archives of the Diocese. The victim reported that:

[H]e was an altar boy (7th grade), and David, had a trailer which he kept at the Appalachian Trail Sites in Shartlesville, brought him there almost weekly, over a period of about 5 years, where they engaged in sexual acts. The victim said, he was not a willing participant, but David threatened to harm or kill him.

David also took pictures of the victim engaged in sexual acts and threatened to use them to embarrass him. David offered to leave the priesthood, if the victim would go away with him.

The victim then indicated that he knew of many other boys who were victimized by Soderlund. The victim added that he struggled greatly with substance abuse and intimacy due to the abuse. The trauma from the abuse had cost him his marriage and a relationship with his two sons.

Soderlund was placed on “sick leave” in July 1980 and was sent to Villa St. John Vianney Hospital. On July 3, 1980, a document written by Muntone recorded the following;

After James [Gaffney] left, the attorney questioned me a bit and spoke of his plan to make contact with the prosecutor over the weekend. I spoke with the attorney by telephone on Saturday evening, July 5th. He informed me that the prosecutor had assured him if the parents would not make an issue of the matter, he would not prosecute. The prosecutor made it clear that he understood Father Soderlund would no longer be stationed in Carbon County.

This account of the Diocese entering into an arrangement with law enforcement to avoid prosecution of Soderlund corroborates the testimony of Gaffney before the Grand Jury. Additionally, on Tuesday, July 8, 1980, Muntone wrote:

I met with [the attorney]. . . at 10 a.m. He spoke in greater detail of his approach to [the prosecutor], and of the assurance he had received that the matter would not be pursued if the parents chose not to press it. In a letter sent by [the attorney] to Monsignor Muntone dated September 12, 1980, [the attorney] reiterates what [the prosecutor] told him regarding the pornographic photos taken by Soderlund and that “the Diocese should retain these photographs for a reasonable period of time. [The prosecutor] did not want to view any of the commercially produced pornographic material and stated you (Muntone) could destroy this material.

On October 11, 1986, after two months characterized by the Diocese as “sick leave,” Soderlund was assigned to serve as a priest in two other parishes. Soderlund was also sent to Good Samaritan Hospital, where he was to minister as chaplain.

Summary

The Grand Jury reviewed additional documentation in the form of a letter from Bishop Welsh to Antonio Cardinal Innocenti, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, showing that Soderlund was permitted to be involved in parish life as a priest immediately upon his return from “sick leave.” Diocesan records indicated that at this time Soderlund began to “act out sexually with a young boy.” According to Diocesan records, “He invited the child to vacation with him in Yellowstone National Park.” The records further indicate, “*Father Soderlund continued to groom the boy by informing the boy of his own bisexuality.*”

The letter written by Welsh noted, “*Once again, Father Soderlund was relieved of his duties and this time placed under the spiritual care of Father John Harvey, O.S.F.S. and the clinical care of Doctor John Kinnane.*”

Soderlund continued to minister even after the latest complaint. On April 28, 1987, the Good Samaritan Hospital Administrator contacted the Diocese, advising them that Soderlund was spending a lot of time with an eight-year-old boy. Soderlund had spent an hour talking to the boy on the telephone, saying that he wanted to take the boy on a trip to a museum. Good Samaritan officials wanted Soderlund to be fired.

An excerpt taken from a transcription of a handwritten report from Muntone stated the following:

I related all of the above to [the Diocesan attorney] and asked for his recommendation. Much to my surprise, he recommended that the chaplain at Sacred Heart Hospital and Soderlund trade places. I tried to explain to him that that was not exactly the way things worked, that the chaplains are employees of the hospital, etc. He said, that however that may be, Good Samaritan Hospital contributed significantly to Soderlund's problems. He said they should have structured his day more fully, and seen to it that his living accommodations were better supervised, etc.

Muntone added that, if Soderlund lived at the rectory at Sacred Heart and “*the hospital held him more accountable for his time, there shouldn't be any problems.*” Muntone responded to Traud's advice by telling the Bishop, “*Also if we do manage to place Soderlund after being fired by Good Samaritan we will have an even harder time convincing the others we have no place for them.*”

On February 23, 1989, Soderlund was placed on administrative leave. During much of 1989 through the early 1990's, Soderlund battled the Diocese in court. Soderlund commenced a civil action against the Bishop in 1996, admitting a “*sexual addiction*” but claiming that his due process rights were violated. In 1997, a judge in Lehigh County dismissed the lawsuit. Soderlund appealed to the Pennsylvania Superior Court, which affirmed the dismissal.

In 2009, Soderlund, now living in Dubois, Wyoming, within the Diocese of Cheyenne, was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to incarceration for two to five years for sexual

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exploitation of children/possession of child pornography on his computer. He is a registered sex offender in Wyoming.