

Very Reverend Henry E. Strassner, V.F.

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1922
YEAR OF DEATH:	2009
ORDINATION:	May 31, 1947

Employment/Assignment History

6/14/1947-9/2/1947	Assistant Pastor, St. Charles Borromeo, Cornwell Heights, PA
9/2/1947-5/16/1961	Allentown Central Catholic High School, Professor (Res. Notre Dame, Bethlehem, 09/08/1954)
5/16/1961 – 6/19/1962	Regional Director, Holy Name Society, Lehigh County, PA
6/19/1962 – 5/21/1963	Assistant, Notre Dame, Bethlehem (Summer Assignment)
5/21/1963 – 3/20/1964	Principal, Notre Dame High School, Green Pond, PA
3/20/1964 – 12/16/1964	St. Michael, Easton, In Residence
12/16/1964 – 11/9/1966	St. Bernard, Easton, In Residence
11/9/1966 – 8/30/1968	Member, Council of Priests-Diocesan Consultors
8/30/1968 – 11/27/1968	Administrator, St. Paul, Allentown, PA
11/27/1968 – 10/6/1968	Member, Council of Priests-Diocesan Consultor
10/6/1968 – 11/1/1969	Director, Family Life Bureau, Lehigh County, PA
11/1/1969 – 11/1/1972	Member, Council of Priests-Diocesan Consultors
11/1/1972 – 1/17/1974	Council of Priests-Diocesan Consultors, Ex Officio Member
1/17/1974 – 12/1/1974	Pastor, St. Paul, Allentown
12/1/1974 – 12/9/1983	Regional Director, Family Life Bureau, Lehigh County, PA
12/9/1983 – 11/1/1984	Member, Diocesan Development and Endowment Committee
11/1/1984 – 6/22/1988	Dean, Lehigh County Diocese of Allentown
6/22/1988 – 8/1/1993	Member, Advisory Board, Allentown Central Catholic High School, PA
8/1/1993 – 2/18/1994	Sick Leave
2/18/1994 – 3/16/2000	Senior Priest/Assistant Pastor, St. Jerome, Tamaqua, PA
3/16/2000 – 6/17/2003	Council of Priests Rep. Parochial Vicars
6/17/2003 – 11/20/2009	Retired Pastor Emeritus of St. Paul Church, Allentown, PA

Summary

Included in documents subpoenaed from the Diocese of Allentown was a handwritten document by Monsignor Muntone dated August 22, 1988, which documented the complaint of a 19-year-old man. The victim reported that Father Henry Strassner kissed him four times on the lips, “*in the same way a woman would kiss,*” within the first hour and a half of a counseling session. Strassner, after being confronted and initially denying even knowing the victim, admitted to the conduct but claimed he “*did not intend anything sexual.*” Strassner claimed the victim “*was essentially parentless and I wanted to simply affirm his sense of self-worth.*” Strassner was sent to see a counselor who, after meeting with Strassner, advised the Diocese that there was “*a lot more going on here than Father Strassner has admitted.*”

Also included in the Diocese’s internal documents was a handwritten memorandum dated July 11, 1991, written by Muntone that recorded two additional complaints of child sexual abuse against Strassner. The memorandum recorded that both victims had been molested as a children. One victim recalled that Strassner sexually abused him between the ages of six and nine while he was struggling with childhood behavioral issues. The other victim provided less detail but was explicit in his characterization of the “*viciousness*” of abusers. He also reported at least one other priest was involved in his abuse.

In the more detailed complaint, the victim reported that his mother had heard Strassner give a lecture on drugs. She invited Strassner into her home to speak to her son. The victim trusted Strassner and was taught to respect him. The victim revealed intimate details of his life to Strassner, who was his counselor and confessor. Strassner told the victim that he needed to “*touch him*” as part of his priestly duties. Touching progressed to Strassner masturbating the victim and performing oral sex on him.

The accounts of both victims were similar. Each victim was devoted to their parish. Each victim was groomed and sexually assaulted by Strassner. One victim reported the abuse to explain why he was withdrawing from his volunteer role in the church. The trauma of his abuse was making his involvement impossible. The other victim was reporting to request that the parish be informed of Strassner’s conduct. He was concerned that others could be victims. At the time of the 1991 report, Strassner was assigned to the Advisory Board of the Allentown Central Catholic High School. There is no indication that the Diocese took any action.

In 2001, a parishioner came forward to report that Strassner had used his authority and position as a priest to make sexual advances during counseling sessions. The parishioner reported that, while seeking counseling during a difficult time in his life, Strassner assaulted the thirty-one-year-old man and took advantage of the man’s vulnerability.

In 2004, a 53-year-old man reported that he was sexually assaulted by Strassner in 1977 when he was aged 26 or 27. The abuse occurred at St. Paul’s church located at Second and Susquehanna Streets in Allentown. The victim stated that Strassner “*French kissed*” him and asked the victim to show him his genitalia. The victim refused. Diocesan records indicated that this assault occurred while Strassner was acting in his official capacity as counselor or in hearing confessions. The victim, at the time of the report to the Diocese, produced a sheet of paper with

Summary

handwritten notes containing the names of approximately 25 or 30 other individuals who he alleged were similarly sexually assaulted by Strassner. The Diocese provided the victim counseling.

In November 2011, a then-63-year-old victim reported to the Diocese he had been sexually abused by Strassner when he was in the seventh or eighth grade. The victim was made to perform oral sex on Strassner and Strassner performed oral sex on the victim. The victim did not report the abuse because he felt humiliated and subsequently became a “*criminal all his life.*”

Within undated documents provided by the Diocese were handwritten notes indicating two victims, both with deep personal issues, whom Strassner exploited for purposes of grooming and ultimately sexually abused. According to the document, counseling was a part of their lives as they battled drugs and alcohol and even contemplated suicide. One of the victims was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Secret or confidential documents of the Diocese showed that the Diocese was aware of Strassner’s abuse of his position as early as 1988. Notes by Muntone relating to the allegations was a common observation throughout this investigation. Those notes were commonly addressed to the bishop at the time or forwarded to the bishop through another memorandum or note. Personnel decisions were ultimately within the exclusive purview of the bishops, who continued to return Strassner to ministry within the Diocese after each allegation with little regard for Strassner’s record of abusing his position. By way of example, in August 1993, Strassner took “sick leave” and went to Jemez Springs, New Mexico, for approximately six months. After his return, Strassner continued as an active priest until his retirement in June 2003. Even after retirement, Strassner was granted the status of “Pastor Emeritus” of St. Paul in Allentown.