

Reverend Anthony J. Cipolla

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1943
YEAR OF DEATH:	2016
ORDINATION:	October 28, 1972

Employment/Assignment History

12/06/1972-11/14/1974	Parochial Vicar, St. Bernard Church, Mt. Lebanon, PA
11/15/1974-5/20/1975	Parochial Vicar, Immaculate Conception, Washington, PA
5/21/1975-9/22/1975	Parochial Vicar, St. Philomena, Beaver Falls, PA
9/23/1976-7/04/1978	Parochial Vicar, St. Agatha, Bridgeville, PA
7/05/1976-10/08/1978	Parochial Vicar, St. Francis Xavier, Pittsburgh, PA
10/09/1978-6/28/1983	Parochial Vicar, St. Canice, Knoxville, PA
6/28/1983-7/05/1983	Parochial Vicar, St. Philip, Crafton, PA (7 days)
12/01/1983-11/01/1988	Chaplin, McGuire Memorial Home for Exceptional Children, New Brighton, PA
11/01/1988-9/19/2002	Leave of Absence
9/19/2002	Laicized

Summary

Pursuant to a Grand Jury subpoena, records concerning Father Anthony Cipolla were provided by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, including a confidential Diocesan file, personnel and legal document files, victim files and files containing numerous copies of documents related to civil litigation. As detailed further below, the Grand Jury heard testimony from two of Cipolla's victims, their mother and by members of the Pittsburgh Police Department who investigated the victims' allegations.

These files and testimony reflected that during the time Cipolla served as a priest, three different Bishops headed the Diocese. Cipolla was moved by his superiors from parish to parish, throughout the Diocese, several times during his tenure, for a total of eight moves in a sixteen year period.

Cipolla was first accused of sexually abusing children, specifically, two brothers who were ages 9 (first victim) and 12 (second victim) in 1978 while Cipolla was assigned to St. Francis Xavier. The abuses occurred in Cipolla's bedroom in the rectory and also in a hotel room in Dearborn, Michigan. On July 25, 1978, the victims' mother called the Pittsburgh Police Department and criminal charges were filed. Ultimately, the criminal charges were not pursued to a conclusion because, according to the mother, she was harassed and threatened by church officials to drop the charges and to "*let the church handle it.*"

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Members of the Pittsburgh Police Department who investigated the abuse of the brothers testified before the Grand Jury. The Grand Jury learned that on July 25, 1978, police responded to a residence in Upper Brighton Heights where they met the first victim and his mother. The first victim was taken to the hospital for an examination and detectives thereafter took over the investigation.

The Grand Jury was informed that the detectives subsequently interviewed the first victim, with his mother and father present. During the interview, the first victim related that on July 25, 1978 at approximately 1515 hours, he had gone to St. Francis Xavier church/rectory for the purpose of communion instructions as communion was scheduled to take place on July 29, 1978. The victim reported that he was taken to the bedroom of Cipolla after he had answered some questions pertaining to his catechism instructions. In the bedroom, the victim was told, "*I (Cipolla) did this to you before. I'll do this again.*" According to the victim, Cipolla shut all of the curtains and told the victim to take off his clothes. Cipolla took all of his clothes off and Cipolla placed a thermometer in the boy's mouth and stethoscope to his chest and told him he was going to examine him again. The boy reported that Cipolla sat in a chair by the bed and he sat on his lap while Cipolla reached around and touched the boy's penis in a squeezing motion; first, 20 times and then 50 times. The victim stated that he knew this because Cipolla counted every time he squeezed the victim's penis. The victim also reported that Cipolla placed his finger inside the victim's anus at one time. The child stated that he got up when Cipolla was done and sat on the bed. Cipolla told him that this was their secret and it would be a sin if he told anyone. He was made to sign a paper saying he would not tell anyone. The victim reported that he believed there was a list of names under a table in the room but he did not know what it meant. Detectives were told by parents that when the victim came home, he seemed scared. When they questioned him about it, he told them what had happened.

The first victim told investigators that Cipolla had done the same thing to him approximately three weeks earlier. Cipolla had also stated, "*I went through this same thing with your brother, and the doctor would charge \$60 for this.*"

The second victim was interviewed by the detectives and reported that he was a victim of the same type of conduct as his brother. He believed that these incidents occurred "*during the early vacation period of the summer of 1977.*" He explained that after school let out for the summer and before a trip to Dearborn, Michigan, he was told to get a physical examination. Cipolla informed his mother that if her son came to the rectory, he would check her son's heart and blood pressure and they would not have to spend any money. When the second victim arrived at the rectory he was told to take off all of his clothing. Cipolla then took his blood pressure and checked his heart with a stethoscope. Cipolla then checked him for a hernia and the second victim was made to bend over. Cipolla checked his rectum by placing his finger into it. When the child asked what that was for, Cipolla stated that he was checking to see if there was anything in there. When asked why he never told his parents, he stated that he just thought he was getting a physical examination. He further stated that the priest asked him to come to the rectory and that he would pay him to clean up his room, but that the victim never went. The victim noted that the price of \$3.00 was mentioned.

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On July 25, 1978, a search warrant was executed at the St. Francis Xavier rectory. Investigators recovered the following: 1) One stethoscope; 2) One blood pressure gauge; 3) One thermometer; and, 4) Three 3x5" index cards containing the names of the [victims]. Although Cipolla admitted that he "examined" the two children, he said he did it "because they had related that they were a bit ill and he felt he was being of service for the family." When detectives asked him why he told the youths to take off all of their clothing, Cipolla stated that he had not given them such an instruction; instead, he claimed that when he had entered the room, "that is the way they were." Cipolla denied placing his finger in the victim's anus and denied placing his hand on the victim's penis.

After speaking with the mother of the boys and hearing her request to prosecute, the detectives obtained an arrest warrant for Cipolla. However, when investigators arrived for the preliminary hearing on August 28, the charges were dismissed. As one of the investigators told the Grand Jury:

[I] didn't recall seeing Father Cipolla, but I do recall there was - - approximately - - there was five men and it has been a while back. I don't know if they were all attorneys or who they belonged to. But one of them approached me and told me that the mother doesn't want to press charges and they - - to the effect they didn't want to get the priest in any trouble or hurt the priest. Something to that effect. And I said, 'Well, what about the boy?' And I didn't get an answer. So I kind of asked again. I said, 'What do we want to do with the boy? He is the one who is the victim here.' And I was kind of ignored, to be honest about it. And the case was dropped, thrown out, whatever you want to call it, and it was nothing that the police - - that we could do because the Magistrate went along with it and dumped the case. So here we are today.

On August 18, 2017, the mother of the victims testified before the Grand Jury. She recounted how her family was friendly with Cipolla, trusted him and thought that he was "a nice man." With respect to her younger son (first victim), she described the following events when he came home following his catechism class with Cipolla:

When he came back, his two eyes were all puffy . . . Everybody was upset because I couldn't -- I'm asking them, 'What's wrong with you? Why are your eyes all red? What's going on?' [The first victim] said, 'I can't tell you, mom.' I said, well, 'You better tell me or I'm going to whoop you if you don't tell.' [The first victim] said, 'Well, I can't because I swore on a Bible that I wouldn't.' I'm like, 'What do you mean? There's isn't anything you can't tell your mother. You know, your mother would understand anything. So what's going on?' [The first victim] says, 'Well, Father Cipolla gave me a physical.' I said, 'A physical?' [The first victim] said, 'Yeah, he made me take my clothes off and gave me a physical.' And I'm thinking, boy, they really changed things since I was going to school. They never made us get a physical for First Holy Communion. I said, 'Why are you crying like that?' He says, 'Because I can't tell you.'

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It took me a while to get it out of him because Father Cipolla made him sign a paper in the Bible saying that he would not tell anyone what had happened to him or that he even had a physical. Anyway, [the first victim] told me that Cipolla put his finger up his behind and started playing with him. [The first victim] called it his dingdong. He said Cipolla played with his dingdong and that sort of thing. And then [the first victim] was like, 'I got to get out of here. My mom's making dinner.' But Cipolla wouldn't let him leave until he signed that paper saying I promise, I swear to God -- or how did it -- it had something to do with God, you know, that he had to swear on the Bible that he would not tell. So that's how I found out.

The Grand Jury learned that records from the first victim's hospital examination revealed the presence of a lubricant on his underwear.

The mother testified that when she arrived at the preliminary hearing, she believed that both of her boys were going to testify. She stated that even though charges had yet to be filed for the abuse of the second victim, it was known that Cipolla had offended on both of them. However, upon arrival, an attorney from the District Attorney's office and an attorney for the Diocese took her into a room. The attorney for the Diocese then began "firing questions at [the first victim and the second victim] really fast." The second victim "had tears in his eyes" and the first victim "was just shaking like a leaf." She stated that the prosecutor permitted the attorney for the Diocese to interrogate both of her sons. The mother stated:

[T]he Diocese attorney was writing all this stuff down and I thought they were going to do something with it. But the next thing I know, the big tall attorney (Diocese Attorney) just started - - he became a bully. He was telling my kids, 'Well, look, you go into court.' He said, 'You're going to be talking - - if you don't want to talk about it now, there could be 100 people in there that you're going to have to talk about it in front of and we're going to tear your testimony apart.' My kids are like, you know, and I was just as scared as they were because how do I know what they can do? They're pushing the District Attorney around or this guy is ignoring the District Attorney. And the District Attorney is not sticking up for us. He isn't telling them, you know, 'Hey, don't talk to them kids like that' or 'Don't talk to that woman like that.' He just let him say whatever he wanted to do and he did. And he intimidated us really bad.

The mother further recounted that the Diocesan attorney was relentless regarding how this would negatively affect her children. According to the mother:

The Diocese Attorney said, 'Don't you understand how embarrassed -- you see them kids. You see how embarrassed they are. They're not going to want to go in in front of a hundred people.' And they kept talking like that. They were scaring my kids half to death and it scared me too.

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The mother testified that the Diocesan attorney also brought up the impact that the case would have on the church. He asked her why they wanted to “hurt the church?” She told the Grand Jury, however, “*We weren't there to hurt the church. We were there to stop Cipolla before he did it again with some other kids.*” According to the mother, the prosecutor told her that if she signed to expunge the charges against Cipolla and he “does it again” within 10 years, “*we can bring those charges back up.*” She was told that “*it would be kept quiet unless he committed the crime again.*”

The mother also reported that one day prior to the preliminary hearing, Bishop Vincent Leonard phoned her. Leonard told her that Cipolla “*was going to go through this intensive therapy or something like that to get his mind right and all that.*” Leonard told her that Cipolla “*got that way from hearing confessions and the devil, you know, influenced him.*” Leonard further told her to “*let the church handle it. We've got good psychiatrists. We got good doctors.*” Leonard called her a total of three times stating, “*Just let the church handle it . . .*”

In addition to Leonard calling her immediately following the abuse and prior to the preliminary hearing, Cipolla also attempted to get in touch with the first victim. According to the mother, Cipolla came to their house a few times and tried to call on the telephone. Cipolla wanted to talk to the first victim “*really bad*” but she wouldn’t let him. The mother explained that Cipolla was trying to convince them to drop the charges against him.

The mother further explained that her family was harassed by numerous people in the community who believed that Cipolla was innocent and that her sons were making up the accusations. Some of the harassment included having their car windows shot out, a tire being slashed, an apartment window broken, the first victim being slapped, including in the face “*for telling lies on a poor blessed priest,*” and receiving numerous threatening telephone calls and letters. Due to this harassment, she and her family moved out of the state.

On October 20, 2017, the first victim testified before the Grand Jury and recounted the details of how, on two separate occasions, he was sexually abused by Cipolla. When describing when Cipolla placed a finger in his anus, he stated, “*I felt like that there was—you know, smart to know that - - you know, just something wasn't right about it. And then for him to make me swear like that (not to tell anyone).*” He explained that if he told anyone, “*it would be an unforgiveable sin.*”

With respect to the charges being dropped against Cipolla, his recollection/interpretation as a nine-year-old child was:

I remember my mom being in tears, bawling in tears and, you know, them just trying to make liars out of us. And I remember some compassion from some police officers, though, you know, and them just being like, you know, they - - they felt like their hands were tied. I know there was a jail in that building, too; but I don't remember exactly what building it was. And I just remember asking them questions as a kid would, and I was just - - I was kind of - - you know, how kids have a tendency to block stuff out. I wasn't really bumming except for

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watching my mother bawling her eyes out. But I remember - - yeah, I remember them. Just from what I understand and remember, they (the attorneys) tried to just say, you know, they would make me look like a liar and there was nothing we could do.

The first victim explained to the Grand Jury how the abuse affected his life. He noted his suffering (losing his father to suicide and losing his brother who was struck and killed by a car) and stated that he would have been able to handle it better “*without [the sexual abuse] happening to me, you know. I feel like I would've had a way more sound mind.*” He ended his testimony with the statement, “*God's word never returns void.*”

The Grand Jury also heard testimony by the second victim about his abuse by Cipolla. He stated that Cipolla gave him an anal exam once at the St. Francis Xavier rectory and a second time at a hotel room in Dearborn. He ended his testimony by stating:

Basically, when a child is fooled with in any way, shape, or form, it is a lasting injury. It is a lifelong injury. And I'm assuming some recover from fully others never recover from. I consider myself one of the lucky ones that - - having a stronger mind and ability to deal with adversity, but it is ongoing. I still have, you know, my issues with authority at points; and I still have my anger issues, but making great strides. And if there is anything that you as a grand jury can do to ensure that you - - if you can save just one child, I have done my job. You have done yours. Please, please protect the children. Please.

After these sexual abuses occurred and the charges were dropped, the Diocese reassigned Cipolla immediately to St. Canice where he reoffended on another young male.

In 1988, a third victim reported that he was sexually abused by Cipolla for approximately a four year period when he was 13 to 17 years old. Notes by Father Theodore Rutkowski dated June 22, 1988 which were contained in subpoenaed Diocesan files, stated that the boy moved to the Pittsburgh area when he was 12 years of age and Cipolla asked him to become an altar boy at St. Canice. Cipolla became a father figure to him.

The third victim reported that he saw nude pictures of young boys in some files in Cipolla's room and that some of the boys were masturbating in these pictures; Cipolla would give him “*physicals*” telling the victim that he (Cipolla) was a “*missionary doctor*;” that after he showered Cipolla would insist on putting talcum powder all over his body including his genitals; and that he would go on vacations with Cipolla, who would hug and him while they shared a bed.

The third victim advised that in September 1987 he entered St. Paul Seminary to become a priest but left in November 1987 because of his confused, four year relationship with Cipolla.

Documents dated July 1, 1988 contained within the subpoenaed files, indicated that the Diocese conducted an “*internal review*” and concluded that the third victim's allegations “*were*

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without foundation and the matter be dropped.” The police were not informed of these allegations against Cipolla.

In December of 1988, the third victim reported the sexual abuse to the Beaver County District Attorney’s Office.

Because of the allegations lodged against him again, Cipolla was sent by Bishop Wuerl to St. Luke Institute for a psychiatric examination and evaluation. The staff at St. Luke’s recommended that Cipolla “*not have any ministry which involves children.*” It was further recommended that Cipolla report immediately to St. John Vianney Hospital in Downingtown. Cipolla adamantly refused to go there. Wuerl informed Cipolla that he did not have to go for treatment to St. John Vianney specifically, but that he did have to go to a “*bona fide*” church-approved facility that they both agreed on and that he needed to do this sooner rather than later.

Cipolla refused to cooperate and insisted on going to a facility of his choosing, St. Michael’s Institute in New York City, which is an outpatient counseling center. Wuerl tried to discourage him from going there because St. Michael’s was not a church-approved facility.

Cipolla nonetheless went to St. Michael’s and from it received a “*glowing*” evaluation that basically disagreed with everything in the report from St. Luke’s. Cipolla hired an attorney who wrote to Wuerl requesting that he reassign Cipolla to a parish based on the report from St. Michael’s, which found no bar to such an assignment.

In a letter to Wuerl dated March 16, 1989, Cipolla indicated that he had changed his mind and was going to cooperate. The letter said Cipolla would go to St. John’s.

However, three weeks later, in a letter from Cipolla to Wuerl dated April 6, 1989, Cipolla asked to be released from the Diocese so that he might seek another diocese in which to serve. In reply correspondence, Wuerl indicated that Cipolla had to secure a letter from the Bishop of the Diocese in which he wished to serve. Wuerl also told Cipolla that he (Wuerl) would have to write to that Bishop and tell him of the sexual abuse allegations that had been lodged against Cipolla, as well as the findings and recommendations of St. Luke’s.

In a May 15, 1989 letter, Wuerl informed Cipolla that he (Wuerl) would be meeting with his advisors to discuss Cipolla’s situation including his refusal to report to St. John’s and his request to leave the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Wuerl warned Cipolla that he would not be able to exercise his priestly ministry unless he went for the recommended evaluation. In a letter dated June 6, 1989, Wuerl told Cipolla that he is still unassignable to pastoral ministry. In a subsequent letter dated June 30, 1989, Wuerl notified Cipolla that he could not be reinstated until he underwent the evaluation (at St. John’s) recommended by St. Luke’s. Cipolla repeatedly wrote to Wuerl requesting to be reinstated. His requests were all denied because he continued to refuse to go for the recommended evaluation and counseling.

While these communications were occurring, Cipolla continued to present himself as a priest in good standing despite being repeatedly warned by Wuerl to stop doing so. On

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September 17, 1990, Wuerl wrote to Cipolla, and notified him that his canonical faculties had been removed because he failed to take the actions directed. He therefore could not act as a priest in good standing; could not conduct any public celebrations as a priest; and could not wear priestly attire. He could not resume doing any of these things until he obtained a church-approved evaluation.

In October 1992, the third victim filed a civil suit against Cipolla, the Pittsburgh Diocese and several officials of the Diocese. The lawsuit maintained that as a result of the above-detailed 1978 sexual allegations involving the two brothers, the defendants should have known that Cipolla was using his position as a Catholic priest to gain access to and to acquire the confidence of others and otherwise seduce minor male children for his sexual gratification. It also alleged that Cipolla's superiors in the Diocese covered that up.

On March 9, 1993 an order from the Vatican called a "Signatura" ruled that Wuerl violated Canon Law and ordered that Cipolla should be reinstated as a priest in good standing.

On March 27, 1993 Wuerl asked the Supreme Tribunal to re-open the case involving Cipolla because there were factual errors.

On September 30, 1993 this civil lawsuit was settled out of court with an undisclosed financial settlement.

In April 1993, Wuerl traveled to Rome in connection with the appeal to the Supreme Tribunal. When he returned, he issued a precept reminding Cipolla that he was not to celebrate the sacraments publicly or to identify himself as a priest in good standing. Wuerl again instructed Cipolla to go get the recommended psychological evaluation at a church-approved hospital or it would be considered an act of disobedience.

In September 1995, the Vatican reversed the "Signatura" and declared that Wuerl acted properly when he banned Cipolla from ministry. Even after the "official" ruling from the Vatican that he was no longer a priest in good standing, Cipolla continued to perform masses and to present himself as a priest in good standing, even though he was advised in person, several times, that he was barred from doing these things. Cipolla's appeal to the Vatican was denied in November 1996.

Following the Vatican's September 1995 ruling, Cipolla was assigned to St. John Vianney Manor and was told he must report for this assignment by February 29, 1996. They reminded him again that he was not to present himself as a priest in good standing and that in order for him to be reinstated he would have to undergo the recommended psychological evaluation. Cipolla told Diocese officials that they could not force him to do this and not even the pope could make him.

Wuerl repeatedly insisted that Cipolla meet with him and the other church officials, but Cipolla kept declining to meet, offering excuses as to why he could not meet.

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In March 1996, Cipolla wrote to Wuerl requesting additional money. He complained that he had not received his priestly salary since December 1995. In April 1996, Father John Kozar wrote to Cipolla, telling him that, since he was put on leave in 1988, the Diocese had provided him with a monthly check along with his medical insurance benefits which, to date, then totaled \$135,000. Kozar added that in return for this the church had received nothing in the way of priestly ministry, service or cooperation and an increase scandal in the eyes of the community. Kozar wrote:

At the present you are being provided a residence by the diocese at St. John Vianney Manor, a residence for priest of this diocese. The cost of providing this residence for you is \$782 per month in addition to the \$638 afforded you monthly by way of the medical coverage offered for active priest[s]; namely Blue Cross/Blue Shield coverage in the amount of \$190 per monthly; Major Medical coverage at the expense of \$90 per month; dental insurance in the amount of \$25 per month; and a monthly payment in the amount of \$333 to the Priest Benefit Plan in anticipation of your retirement. With all these provisions, the Church of Pittsburgh is more than meeting your need to substances and social assistance.

In May 1996, Cipolla caught again acting as a priest in good standing, Wuerl issued another degree forbidding him to do so and asked to meet with Cipolla. Cipolla refused claiming medical stress.

In July 1996, Cipolla wrote Wuerl again asking for his priestly salary. By this time the Diocese had received his tax statements (although not all of the documents requested in March of 1996) which showed he had significant money elsewhere (because of the interest he reported) and determined Cipolla was not “a priest in need.” The Diocese therefore refused to provide him any more money.

In September 1996, the Diocese received a letter from an individual in Warren, Ohio which claimed that Cipolla’s parents were helping him financially and that he was performing masses regularly in their home where he was staying part time. In November of 1996 the Diocese also received information from several people who said that they were on a recent pilgrimage and that Cipolla was there celebrating masses and telling everyone he was a priest in good standing. Over the next six years numerous reports were received that Cipolla was continuing to conduct himself in the same manner.

In July 2002 Wuerl wrote to the Pope asking for Cipolla’s dismissal from priesthood. Official approval for Cipolla’s dismissal as a priest was issued on September 19, 2002. Despite this, in December of 2003 the Diocese received information that Cipolla was still saying masses and acting as a priest.

In August 2015 Cipolla wrote to Bishop Zubik asking him for retirement and a monthly stipend and pension for the time he served as a priest. Cipolla was informed in a January 2016 letter that that he did not qualify for a pension because he was dismissed as a priest.