

Joseph Bennett

The Utter Failure of Cardinal Francis George

The Joseph Bennett file is a stunning example of Cardinal Francis George's hands-on involvement with child sex abuse. The file also shows how the Archdiocese took months to make important decisions on child safety, did not consider important evidence, required that victims get background checks, and continually erred on the side of predators. The Archdiocese and its Review Board also seemed to review cases in a vacuum, refusing to take into account earlier allegations against Bennett when investigating new allegations.

In his deposition Cardinal George also blames the Review Board for inaction in removing Bennett, although the Charter for The Protection of Children and Young People states that the board is "consultative" and that the Cardinal can act without their approval at any time.

The documents also show Cardinal George kept Bennett in ministry almost four years after initial accusations surfaced because the allegations were not found substantiated even though the victim took and passed a polygraph regarding his claim. The Cardinal's deposition and the file also suggest that the Archdiocese:

- May have withheld evidence from the Review Board;
- Had more concerns about Bennett's canonical rights than child safety;
- Gave misleading information to other bishops about Bennett;
- Claimed that a victim's accurate memory of freckles and other markings on Bennett's body were not enough evidence to remove Bennett from ministry;
- Told parishioners to "question accusers;"
- Never checked to see if boys were working in the rectory with Bennett, even after the Review Board requested Bennett be removed from ministry;
- Called Bennett a "fine pastoral leader" when he was reappointed as pastor of Holy Ghost in 2003, even though there were known outstanding abuse allegations against the cleric; and
- Blamed Vatican policies for not removing clerics with allegations of molesting children.

TIMELINE OF DOCUMENTS – JOSEPH BENNETT

1963 - Mundelain Seminary

1963-1964 Bennett is accused of sexually abusing (including rape) at least two children, an 8-9-year-old girl and a 14-year-old boy. Both state that they were invited to Bennett's ordination.

1966 – Ordained

5/16/66 – Associate Pastor, St. John the Baptist De La Salle, Chicago

1966 According to a 2006 report, Bennett is accused of continuing to abuse a 14-year-old boy in the basement of the parish. Victim alleges that Bennett gives him

alcohol and allows him upstairs in the rectory. Later witnesses corroborate the story. (AOC 000327- AOC 000328)

Mid-1960s According to a 2003 report, Bennett is accused of abusing two sisters. (AOC 000305)

6/15/73 – Associate Pastor, Our Lady of the Ridge, Chicago Ridge

1/30/76 -In residence, St. Joseph and St. Anne and Prison Chaplain, Cook County Jail

1976-1978 According to a 2002 report, Bennett is accused of sexually abusing a boy at St. Joseph and St. Anne. The boy's attorney reports the abuse to the Archdiocese in 2002 and supplies a lie detector test that the victim passes. Victim also confirms Bennett was a prison chaplain.

07/01/78 – 01/01/81 Associate, St. Christina's Chicago

01/01/81-1989 Pastor, St. John de la Salle, Chicago

1980's According to a 2006 report, Bennett is accused of sexually abusing a boy.

1989- Pastor, St. Agnes, Chicago, IL

1991-Pastor, Our Lady of Fatima, Chicago, IL

According to a 2005 report, allegations of financial mismanagement and that Bennett was stealing parish monies at Our Lady of Fatima. (AOC 000288)

10/16/95 - Dean of Deanery VA

1997- Pastor, Holy Ghost, Chicago, IL

Bennett allegedly abuses a girl at Holy Ghost. Abuse reported to Archdiocese on 3/23/06 and they decide to not investigate, since Illinois Department of Child and Family Services is investigating. (AOC 000411)

10/23/02 Internal memo reports a "new allegation" against Bennett (AOC 000185)

11/12/02 Archdiocese receives a formal allegation from a civil attorney on behalf of a victim. It states that Bennett had sexually abused the boy between 1976 and 1978. Boy passes polygraph test and tells civil attorney that Bennett was a prison chaplain at the time. (AOC 000322) Victim is later asked to supply wedding photos, marriage certificates and a statement about the abuse. (AOC 000193)

In a deposition, Cardinal George says he has "no knowledge" of the polygraph, although he claimed to have read Bennett's entire file.

1/14/03 Bennett put under "monitoring" and asks that monitor not be Fr. Len Dubi, Bennett's friend. George keeps Dubi as Bennett's monitor. (AOC 000194)

It is unclear whether board is given copy of polygraph results.

2/9/03 Bennett goes on vacation in Mexico with Dubi. (AOC 000316)

4/26/03 Review board votes 7-0 that there is “no reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse occurred. (AOC 000199) Cardinal George in a handwritten note accepts the findings. (AOC 000192)

7/7/03 Bennett removed from “monitoring”, per review board.

12/03/03 Archdiocese, Cardinal George receive new allegation that Bennett abused two girls, ages 7-9, from 1967-1969. (AOC 000305)

12/19/03 Internal memo shows Leah McCluskey interviewed one of the new victims, who mentions that Bennett has a freckle on his testicle, and that a nun was sexually involved with Bennett and involved with the abuse. (AOC 000305)

12/20/03 Review board told of new allegations. (AOC 000198)

2/23/04 Cardinal George appoints Bennett to a second term as pastor at Holy Ghost. George letter says Bennett has “fine pastoral leadership.” (AOC 000309)

6/8/04 Archdiocese opens file of allegations made in December 2003. (AOC 000188) Case is reported to Cook County by Archdiocese Office of Legal Services. (AOC 000380)

6/19/04 Review Board minutes state that allegation received 12/03/13 warrants investigation. Previous allegation closed in 2003 not re-opened

6/21/04 Review board recommends that Bennett stay in ministry, but suggests that Bennett “should be prudent.” Cardinal George write a handwritten acceptance on the letter. Victim is asked to undergo psychiatric exam. (AOC 000308)

7/30/04 Archdiocese receives new allegation against Bennett. Female victim was 12 to 13 years old when abused at St. John the Baptist. (AOC 000296) Bennett remains in ministry.

3/19/05 Review Board Minutes say two allegations against Bennett under review. They request that Leah McCluskey review Bennett’s file in chancellor and vicar for priest’s offices. Again request that Dubi not monitor Bennett. Bennett remains in ministry. (AOC 000230)

4/5/05 Letter from Vicar for Priests says Cardinal George says Dubi is best monitor for Bennett, against recommendation of review board.

6/2/05 Archdiocese made aware of allegations of financial mismanagement. Allegations involve Len Dubi. (AOC 000288)

7/16/05 Review Board requests information on Bennett’s birthmark and other body marks. They also ask if Dubi is on sabbatical and if he is actually monitoring Bennett. (AOC 000222- AOC 000223; AOC 000287)

- 10/15/05 Review board recommends 8-0 that Bennett be removed from ministry. Cardinal George handwrites on the letter that he accepts the recommendation.
- 11/07/05 George writes letter to Leah McCluskey, saying “upon reflection”, he will not remove Bennett from ministry. (AOC 000386)
- In a 2010 deposition, George says it’s because Bennett had not had the opportunity to properly defend himself.
- 11/19/05 Bennett address review board. Dubi attends the meeting with him and Vicar General Ed Grace coaches Bennett on how to answer questions about the freckles on his scrotum. (AOC 000279; AOC 000277; AOC 000374)
- 12/03/05 Cardinal George addresses review board in support of Bennett. George claims to have read the entire Bennett file and has questions about the board’s conclusions. Board says that victim’s accurate memory of freckles on Bennett’s scrotum are cause for Bennett’s removal. Cardinal George defends Bennett, saying that other parts of the victim’s story are inadequate. George also states that because of “The Code,” he must talk to Rome before taking any action. (AOC 000209; AOC 000271; AOC 000273)
- 12/15/05 Leah McCluskey interviews Fr. Mollan, Bennett’s pastor at St. John the Baptist. He says there were no restrictions on priests having children in their rooms.
- 1/20/06 Fr. Daniel McCormack is arrested for child sex abuse.
- 1/31/06 Cardinal George removes Bennett from ministry without consulting Review Board about his change of mind. Writes letter to Bennett. (AOC 000352)
- 2/1/06 Mother of boy at Holy Ghost notifies archdiocese that her minor son works in the rectory with Fr. Bennett (AOC 000349)
- 2/01/06 Vicar General George Rassas writes Bishop Melczek of Gary, IN. He tells Melczek that there is only one allegation against Bennett from 35 years ago. George is copied on the correspondence. (AOC 000356)
- According to the deposition of Cardinal George, the house was owned by Len Dubi.
- 2/2/06 George goes public with Bennett allegation, claims to press there is only one allegation from 35 years ago. Letter to parishioners says only one alleged victim. (AOC 000384)
- 2/8/06 Archdiocese receives 3 allegations that Bennett abused an altar boy at St. John’s in the mid-to-late 1960s, Victim DR and a resident of the Audi Home. Impossible to determine exact number of allegations. (AOC 000413; AOC 000327- AOC 000328; AOC 000361) Bennett goes to St. John’s and takes photos and tries to get copies of files. (AOC 000371)

- 2/14/06 Because of publicity of allegations, priest at St. John's sends letter to Leah McCluskey and vicar for priests. Letter corroborates that claims of St. John's victims (alcohol, Bennett sexually active with women). Priest was not contacted during review board investigation.
- 2/27/06 Archdiocese receives new allegation from anonymous victim. (AOC 000357)
- 3/07/06 Bennett's canon lawyer requests that victim who remembers freckles on Bennett's scrotum undergo a physical examination. (AOC 000183)
- 3/23/06 Archdiocese receives a report that DCFS is investigating Bennett. The victim, "minor 2," alleges that s/he was molested at Holy Ghost. No specific dates are given. The archdiocese says they will not investigate, since DCFS is actively pursuing the case. (AOC 000411)
- 6/3/06 Cardinal George personally edits Bennett's letter to Holy Ghost parish. Although Bennett has been removed, Bennett's letter is faxed from Holy Ghost. Bennett – per George – is still allowed to hold the office of pastor. (AOC 000338)
- 7/14/06 Cardinal George writes a letter to a parishioner who is upset that Bennett is being removed. George only mentions one allegation and incites letter writer to "talk to [Bennett's] accusers." (AOC 000366)
- 7/27/06 Fr. Kub (also assigned to St. John's with Bennett 1966/67) reports to the Archdiocese that Bennett had contact with kids in trouble and "would have those kids in his room with the door closed." Kub reports telling Bennett to keep kids out of his room. Fr. Dubi comes to rectory and tells Kub to "Mind his own business." (AOC 000333)
- 12/11/06 Bennett goes to Ixtapa with Len Dubi from January 13-27, 2007. (AOC 000331)
- 4/25/07 Archdiocese receives allegation that Bennett abused a girl when she was 8-9 years old while Bennett was a seminarian at Mundelein. (AOC 000329)
- 5/4/07 Bennett attends rally at the capitol for funding for public schools with Len Dubi. (AOC 000326)
- 1/30/08 Attorney for victim who passed polygraph test asks for re-review of case in light of new evidence. Archdiocese refuses. Includes victims declaration. (AOC 000616; AOC 000618)
- 1/30/08 [Cardinal Francis is deposed](#) in order to meet a non-monetary demand of sex abuse survivors. In the deposition, he says that he had no knowledge of one victim's polygraph test, despite having told the Review Board in 2005 that he had read Bennett's entire file. He also testifies that the only reason Bennett was not removed sooner was because he did not have "canonical counsel." George also testifies that he has no power to remove a child molesting cleric until a "process" has begun to defend the cleric.

- 9/3/08 Witness writes letter to Cardinal George to say there were drugs and kids in the St. John's rectory. Also says that Bennett and Dubi took money, approached women in bars, and parents of boys demanded Bennett leave their kids alone. (AOC 000609)
- 5/29/10 Letter says that Cardinal George is not going to dismiss Bennett from the clerical state, but he cannot act as a priest.