

Father Joseph Gausch

Father Joseph Gausch began serving as a priest in the Philadelphia Archdiocese in December 1945 and, based on the Secret Archives file provided, he started to abuse young boys almost immediately thereafter. The abuse included fondling, masturbation, oral sex, and attempted anal rape. It occurred in sacristies, rectories, and on outings. On one occasion in 1974, after Fr. Gausch admitted to Archdiocese officials that allegations of child molestation were true, Chancellor Francis J. Statkus wrote in a memo that, “because of the scandal which already has taken place and because of the possible future scandal, we will transfer him in the near future.”

There is every reason to believe that Fr. Gausch continued his reign of terror throughout his 54 years of service in the Archdiocese. Yet, because of the manner in which complaints of abuse were handled, neither the Grand Jury nor anyone else will be able to determine just how many victims this priest left in his wake.

The Archdiocese discovers letters that Father Gausch wrote detailing his sexual abuse of boys, sends him to do “penance,” and returns him to ministry.

In 1948, Fr. Joseph Gausch was sent to Alexian Brothers Hospital in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to do “penance” for “perversion and homosexuality.” He was ordered to the hospital after letters that he had written to another priest, Fr. Charles L.G. Knapp, were discovered by the assistant pastor at St. Alphonsus, the parish where Fr. Gausch was assigned. The letters describe Fr. Gausch’s abuse of several teenage boys beginning as early as 1946:

- In one letter, written in 1946 when he was assigned to St. Joseph’s parish, Fr. Gausch wrote that he was going to watch a high school football game and that the “trick will be to appear interested in the game and not the players – there are some wows among them.” He continued that “the latest obstacle to my spiritual advancement is a 14 year old 7th grader – not stupid but does not study, wretched home conditions, not a bad kid, attractive as anyone could ask – and sex has already made itself a nice place in his life --- you can see the set up. I was going over town last Friday just as school was dismissing --- his home is over there. He volunteered to walk over with me – a mile and a half. Something to remember Chunk for.”

- In a second letter to fellow priest Fr. Knapp, Fr. Gausch wrote: “Your ‘work’ among the adolescents sounds interesting INDEED. I only hope it is less dangerous than my own escapades with male teenagers. I sometimes feel it is just a question of when I am going to reach out and snatch. I’ve come THAT close so often...” (emphasis in original).
- In a third letter, Fr. Gausch talked about a student at St. Joseph’s and described how “it happened again. We’ve gotten through the wildfire stage and the thing has settled down into solid, wholesome friendship. He needs no idealizing... he’s got the goods... “Teddy” has a grandma who though not sick is housebound and delights in my visits --- you know the rest of the story. That’s the last place on today’s list --- Teddy will be home from school by then. That, pal, is zeal ... who cares for *what*” (emphasis in original).
- Finally, in a May 25, 1948, letter to Fr. Knapp, Fr. Gausch wrote: “This afternoon ... Sister asked me if I would take some of the 8th grade boys to camp today. They are finished their exams and they are a job to keep in tow. I said yes ... we always do, you know ... She told me to take my pick ... decision was based on anything but their qualities of soul, naturally. Kept the crowd small ... purposefully. We worked for a while then lounged ... that’s one name for it ... for at least two solid hours ... result: one more ,e,ory [sic] with a capital ‘M’. It is the closest approximation to an old fashioned roll that I have had in years ... and the subject was oh so satisfactory and (this is what makes the story) willin’ ... “Larry” (the hero of the above piece) plans to go to the lake on the annual trip, told me that in the middle of everything this afternoon. Have since been thinking of something. There are so many signed up and it is so difficult to get a place big enough to hold the mob. Sooooo, I am [sic] thinking, why not make two expeditions out of it. First the official JHN jaunt, and the second I could use as one of my vacation weeks --- just take the “overflow” the second week ... a cozy five or six. Take a small cottage ... and of course, the overflow being handpicked ... with Larry heading the list at

present writing. That is why it would be so convenient if we had our own place. Not too much more to say so I'll double back here. Been hoping for months now to make a masterpiece of this year's vacation, with something like the above in mind ... rounding up a few of the desirables and making off somewhere. After your recent escapades, you may be an invaluable help...". (Appendix D-6)

Upon discovery of these letters, Cardinal Dennis Dougherty suspended Fr. Gausch and sent him to the hospital to do "penance." Father Gausch remained at the hospital from July 21, 1948, until March 1949. There is no indication that any attempts were made to identify or contact the teenage boys that were the subject of the letters.

Father Gausch abuses boys at Our Lady of Peace and Saint Bridget parishes.

After he completed his "penance," Fr. Gausch was assigned to St. Anthony of Padua parish in Easton. He thereafter was transferred as an assistant pastor to several parishes until, in May 1961, he arrived at Our Lady of Peace in Milmont, where he remained until August 1964. His transfer from Our Lady of Peace followed an incident involving molestation of yet another boy.

An April 17, 1974, memo in the file authored by Chancellor Francis J. Statkus revealed that, in 1964, Fr. Gausch had taken a boy from a swimming pool to the rectory at Our Lady of Peace and molested him. No other details were given except to note that Fr. Gausch was immediately transferred to St. Bridget in North Philadelphia.

Father Gausch became assistant pastor at Saint Bridget in August 1964. There he came in contact with "Brian," a 12-year-old altar boy. Father Gausch began by fondling young Brian but quickly escalated to masturbation, oral sex, and attempted anal rape. Brian told the Grand Jury that he came from an extremely religious family whose pride in his being selected as an altar boy was unwavering. This fact played a large part in his inability to speak to anyone about what was happening. Additionally, Fr. Gausch manipulated him by saying that if he were to reveal the abuse, he would not be believed because nobody would believe a "colored" boy. Instead, they would think he was trying to start trouble.

Young Brian never doubted the truth of what Fr. Gausch was telling him. At the time the abuse was going on, he said, there were only about 10 black families in the parish.

Brian told the Grand Jury that the abuse usually occurred after the 7:30 morning Mass, either in the sacristy or the hallway between the church and the rectory. Father Gausch tried to make Brian believe that it was happening because he was “special” and that God was “ok” with it. Father Gausch also told Brian that what was happening made him feel good, and since priests spend all their time making other people feel better sometimes they need someone to make them feel good as well. Brian believed it – Fr. Gausch was a priest, so he had to be telling the truth.

Brian told the Grand Jury that the abuse affected every aspect of his life. When he finally mustered the courage to come forward and set up a meeting with the Secretary for Clergy, William J. Lynn, he wrote out an agenda for the meeting because he wanted to make sure that he remembered all he wanted to say. He wanted to convey that “the abuse had affected his life and his faith and that it had left a scar and that it was now time to uncover the wound and try to diminish the scars and promote some healing.” During the meeting, Msgr. Lynn informed Brian that Fr. Gausch had died and, although he provided no specifics, he also told him that the priest had abused other boys.

At Queen of the Universe, Father Gausch abuses another boy, and nothing is done; he retires in 1992.

In 1973, Fr. Gausch was transferred to Queen of the Universe in Levittown. Thereafter the Chancery was informed that Fr. Gausch was abusing the son of a parishioner, and that a nun with the Sisters of Saint Joseph had commented several times about “Father’s familiar advances toward the boys in the school.”

When confronted with this information by Chancellor Statkus, Fr. Gausch admitted that the allegations against him were true. Monsignor Statkus noted in a memo that, in light of the priest’s conduct and admission to it, “because of the scandal which already has taken place and because of the possible future scandal, we will transfer him in the near future.” Monsignor Statkus also told Fr. Gausch that if “he needs, in his estimation, psychiatric consultation, that he should seek it.” According to the memo, Fr. Gausch was not directed

to this consultation but rather was told that if there was another “lapse,” then he would be directed to it – perhaps on a full-time basis. Monsignor Statkus also informed Fr. Gausch that if, in the future, he did not provide cause for apprehension or suspicion, he would be considered for a pastoral appointment. At no point in the memo or in any subsequent documents was the well-being of the victims considered. Avoidance of scandal was the only consideration.

As the Chancellor had suggested, Fr. Gausch was again transferred, this time to St. Aloysius in Pottstown. And in April 1980, he was elevated to pastor, at Good Shepherd in Philadelphia. When Cardinal Bevilacqua was installed as Archbishop of Philadelphia in February 1988, he retained Fr. Gausch as pastor with no restrictions. In June 1992, Fr. Gausch retired and was named Pastor Emeritus at Good Shepherd.

After Father Gausch’s retirement, “Ross” comes forward to report prior abuse; the Archdiocese investigates the victim and dismisses his report.

On January 13, 1994, a 27-year-old male named Ross contacted the Secretary for Clergy, Msgr. Lynn, to report that he had been sexually abused by Fr. Gausch while serving as an altar boy at Good Shepherd parish in 1980-81. Ross was 12 or 13 years old at the time. Ross told Msgr. Lynn that there was another altar boy who was also abused, and he provided his name.

Ross related that both he and the other boy had been fondled by Fr. Gausch in the sacristy. Monsignor Lynn, having access to the extremely long history of Fr. Gausch in the Archdiocese files, asked Ross whether it was possible that he “misinterpreted” Fr. Gausch’s actions of putting his hand on the boy’s penis. Ross stated that no, he had not misinterpreted the actions. Ross told Msgr. Lynn that all he wanted was to confront Fr. Gausch.

Father Gausch was interviewed on February 15, 1994, and denied the allegations. He said that Ross’s family was “problematic” and that Ross “had a terrible home life.” Father Gausch discussed his own problems of the past but stated that he had overcome them. He refused to meet with Ross. Monsignor Lynn told Fr. Gausch that “the

Archdiocese supported him and that he would investigate a little bit more the background of [Ross].”

Monsignor Lynn did just that: he conducted an investigation not into Fr. Gausch, whose abuse of children went back to 1946, but into the personal history of the victim and his family. Monsignor Lynn tracked down the principal of Good Shepherd’s parish school and a priest who was assigned there from 1976-1980. He also spoke with a nun who taught at St. Clements at the time of Ross’s abuse. Monsignor Lynn learned from these people that Ross was absent from school several times, that the family was known in the community in “unflattering” terms, and that Ross was a poor student.

By contrast, Msgr. Lynn conducted *no* investigation of Ross’s claims, other than to speak with Fr. Gausch. Most notably, he made no effort to speak to the other altar boy who was identified as also being abused. On March 4, 1994, Msgr. Lynn wrote a memo to Cardinal Bevilacqua informing him of the allegations and suggesting that both he and his aide, Fr. James Beisel were “very suspicious” of Ross’s allegations. He also wrote that “it is our suspicion that he is motivated by the hope of a cash settlement with the Archdiocese.” Monsignor Lynn noted this “suspicion” even though Ross at no point made a request for a cash settlement. Monsignor Lynn never recommended that Fr. Gausch be evaluated, nor did he recommend that the other named victim be contacted to determine whether he had in fact been abused.

Cardinal Bevilacqua did nothing except to order that “every sensitive allegation, including those involving incidents to have occurred in excess of five years ago, are to be brought to the attention of the Archbishop on the same day that they are received in the office of the Vicar for Administration.” Father Gausch died on May 30, 1999.

Following Father Gausch’s death other victims come forward.

- **“David”**

On August 11, 2000, David wrote a letter to the Cardinal stating that he had been sexually abused by Fr. Gausch on several occasions when he worked at the Good Shepherd

rectory in the early 1980s. He also stated that Fr. Gausch was “unprofessionally friendly with some of the male children who either worked in the rectory or attended the school.”

Cardinal Bevilacqua forwarded the letter to Msgr. Lynn. The Secretary for Clergy spoke by telephone with David, who said that the only thing he wanted done was to make the Cardinal aware of Fr. Gausch’s behavior. Apparently at no point in the conversation did Msgr. Lynn ask for names of additional victims.

- **“Patrick”**

On March 25, 2002, Patrick informed Msgr. Lynn that Fr. Gausch, while assigned at Saint Stanislaus Church (from 1956 to 1961), had sexually assaulted him when he was 18 years old. Patrick said that it was very difficult for him to cope and that he spent many years not speaking to anyone about what happened. He said that he drank excessively to numb the pain. Monsignor Lynn told him Fr. Gausch was dead and offered counseling assistance.

- **“Sammy”**

On March 27, 2002, Sammy informed Msgr. Lynn that Fr. Gausch had abused him in 1963-64 when he was an altar boy at Our Lady of Peace Church in Milmont. Sammy said that he had told his father about what had happened and his father had confronted the pastor, Fr. Noll, as well as Fr. Gausch, who was transferred in August 1964 to St. Bridget’s. Sammy expressed his disgust at the fact that the Church had transferred Fr. Gausch to other parishes where he was able to abuse other children.

Sammy also talked about how he had heard Cardinal Bevilacqua publicly state that there were only 35 victims of sexual abuse in 50 years in the Archdiocese. (Sammy was confused on the numbers – the Cardinal had said there were 35 priests and 50 victims. The point, however, remains that the Cardinal grossly underestimated the number of victims.) Sammy said that he felt even more victimized by that statement because he felt more isolated than he had before. He thought, “I can’t be only one of 35 people this ever happened to. Am I that big a freak.” Sammy said that during a meeting with Msgr. Lynn and his aide, they did not give any information except that Fr. Gausch was dead. They would not confirm that he was transferred based on this incident, nor would they say

whether he had any psychiatric treatment. They only stated that “situations back then were handled differently.”