

## **Monsignor Leonard A. Furmanski**

*Monsignor Leonard A. Furmanski, ordained in 1959, sexually abused children throughout his 44 years as a teacher, principal, and pastor in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. As pastor during the 1980s at Sacred Heart parish in Swedesburg, Msgr. Furmanski started a sex education class for grade schoolers. He lay on top of a 12-year-old girl and rubbed his erect penis against her under the pretense of “instructing” her in sex education. He also arranged sexual encounters between the girl and an altar boy. Monsignor Furmanski later admitted to “fondling” boys in the 1980s. He was accused by one altar boy of forcing him to perform oral sex.*

*Cardinal Bevilacqua left Msgr. Furmanski in ministry following an allegation in 1999 that the priest had instructed an 11-year-old altar boy to, as the boy described it, “massage Monsignor’s leg.” Despite evidence suggesting that sexual abuse had occurred, Secretary for Clergy William J. Lynn wrote to the Cardinal that “there is no reason for Furmanski not to return to the parish.”*

*In 2002, Cardinal Bevilacqua left Msgr. Furmanski in ministry after learning that, as a teacher at Cardinal O’Hara High School in 1964, Msgr. Furmanski had sexually abused a freshman student after the boy confided to him about being raped by his algebra teacher in a janitor’s closet at school. The victim told Msgr. Lynn that Msgr. Furmanski abused him for months, fondling the boy naked and having him do the same in return.*

*Still ashamed 38 years later, the victim asked if Msgr. Furmanski had been involved with other boys. The Secretary for Clergy, having personally handled the allegations of the 11-year-old altar boy three years earlier, told the victim he knew of no others. In 2003, an investigator hired by the Archdiocese’s law firm accused Msgr. Furmanski’s 1964 victim of lying. The investigator suggested that if the victim did not drop the matter, his wife might lose her job.*

### **Monsignor Furmanski abuses a Cardinal O’Hara High School student in 1964.**

On March 10, 2002, “Alex” wrote to Cardinal Bevilacqua telling the Cardinal that he had been abused as a young teen at Cardinal O’Hara High School 38 years earlier – by his algebra teacher and then his religion teacher, Msgr. Leonard Furmanski. Alex asked to speak to someone about it.

On June 18, 2002, Alex met with the Secretary for Clergy, William J. Lynn, and his assistant, Fr. Vincent Welsh. Alex related that his ordeal began freshman year – 1964 – at O’Hara when his 6’6”, 370-380 pound algebra teacher asked him to stay after school, took him to the cafeteria, bought him a soda, talked with him about his grades and problems at home between his parents, then bent him over a chair in a closet and raped him. The

teacher fondled him in the closet on several other occasions. Alex told the Grand Jury that on one occasion his teacher suspended him by his wrists with a belt and groped his genitals, demanding, while squeezing the boy's genitals, that the boy keep the abuse secret. The teacher also told Alex, "this just stays between us, and you keep your nose clean and you'll graduate and get out of my class."

Alex explained to Msgr. Lynn and Fr. Welsh that he could not bring himself to tell his father or his mother, who had previously suffered a nervous breakdown, so he confided in Msgr. Furmanski, the priest who taught his religion class. To his dismay, Msgr. Furmanski responded by touching and fondling the boy's genitals, asking whether this was what the algebra teacher had done. Monsignor Furmanski told Alex that his, Msgr. Furmanski's, conduct was proper because he loved Alex.

Alex further told Msgr. Lynn and Fr. Welsh that he became a regular helper at a bookstore that Msgr. Furmanski ran at the school. There, once or twice a week, the priest had Alex take his pants down and he fondled the boy's genitals. The priest took down his own pants as well and had the student masturbate him. Monsignor Furmanski continued to abuse Alex throughout the semester until one day when he told him he was no longer needed because he had been replaced by other boys.

Alex confided in the Archdiocese managers that he never told anyone – not even his wife of 30 years – until stories of priest abuse hit the newspapers in 2002. He said he was embarrassed because he felt what Msgr. Furmanski had done was his fault. He related that he had dropped out of college after one year and began drinking heavily.

**Monsignor Furmanski abuses an 11-year-old girl for almost two years, beginning in 1977.**

"Regina" told the Grand Jury that she met Msgr. Furmanski in 1977 when he became pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Swedesburg and she was a 6th grader. The "boisterous," "outgoing," "always laughing" Msgr. Furmanski was well liked in the parish, leading to an increase in collections. Regina was happy when Msgr. Furmanski started a youth group for girls, and she became an enthusiastic member. Monsignor Furmanski

initiated and began teaching a somewhat graphic sex education to her 6th grade class, including his frequent drawing of diagrams of male genitalia on the blackboard.

Monsignor Furmanski began asking Regina to do clerical work around the rectory, where he also employed numerous altar boys. No other priests lived in the rectory. As one of the students chosen to help the popular priest, she felt special. She believed it gave her a certain status among the other students, and she knew her family was pleased as well. Monsignor Furmanski was aware of and attentive to her vulnerability; he knew she came from a broken home, with no father and a sick mother, and talked with her about her family. Subtly, he moved the conversation to asking the girl whether she understood everything he was teaching in his sex education class. He asked whether she had a boyfriend, and whether she had ever been kissed. He pulled out a manual with pictures of male anatomy and explained to her that the penis went into the vagina – and not elsewhere. These private instructions in sex education were even more explicit and graphic than what Msgr. Furmanski taught in class. Regina told the Grand Jury that she felt a little embarrassed, but that she still trusted the priest at that point.

She began to feel less comfortable when, during 7th grade, Msgr. Furmanski asked whether she was a virgin and, upon hearing that she was, told her it was important for her to “feel what a man’s erection is like.” When they were alone he instructed Regina to lie on the floor. He then proceeded to lie, still clothed, on top of the 12- or 13-year-old girl and simulate intercourse, rubbing his erect penis against her. She told the Grand Jury that this so-called sex education continued for two years, three or four times a month.

Regina told no one, fearing they would not believe her and that she would get in trouble. She said the priest told her that, if she did try to report the abuse, he would say that she had seduced him.

After a year and a half of the “sex education,” Msgr. Furmanski added a new dimension – a 7th-grade altar boy, “Gregory.” Regina told how Msgr. Furmanski called her to the rectory – to do clerical work, she thought – and then said, “Someone’s waiting for you in the other room.” There, in the dark, with music playing, she found Gregory. She described how he kissed her, touched her breasts, and put his hands down her pants and his fingers into her vagina. She explained how Msgr. Furmanski prepared her for these actions

ahead of time. He told her what boys like to do and instructed her that she should let them, for example, put their fingers in her pants because “it only makes more frustration if you don’t, if you stop and you say no....”

She told the Grand Jury that because Msgr. Furmanski was orchestrating this behavior, she felt she could not say no. The priest questioned her about what happened with Gregory after their encounters – although she suspected he might have been watching because he seemed already to know.

Only when Msgr. Furmanski began to pressure her to have sexual intercourse with Gregory did Regina finally escape her abuse. She told the Grand Jury that she became scared because the priest would get angry when she refused to have intercourse. One night while Gregory was making his unwelcome sexual advances, Regina broke away and ran from the rectory with her pants undone.

Monsignor Furmanski’s abuse of Regina continued. Finally, one night when she was in 8th grade, she had had all she could take. The priest had waited until the housekeeper was gone for the day and locked the door as he routinely did before molesting the girl. As he was lying on top of her, grinding his penis against her, she told him that if he did not get off she would scream until someone heard her. The priest got up and allowed her to leave.

Monsignor Furmanski continued to pursue Regina. He called her house and told her mother that Regina should have been at the rectory working. For the most part, Regina said, she was able to avoid the priest, seeing him only at family functions such as funerals. Once she entered high school, she had very little contact with Msgr. Furmanski.

Regina testified that she told no one about her abuse at the time except a boy she dated in high school, “Martin,” and his mother. She told them, she explained, because she had an extreme reaction when Martin, “just goofing around,” lay on top of her. She said she “flipped out,” “threw him off,” and told him not to come near her. She said she “crumbled so bad there that he went and got his mother.” Regina testified that she told Martin’s mother the story but extracted her promise not to tell anyone.

Twenty-four years later, Regina testified that she still considered herself a Catholic but could not go into a church. The smells, the atmosphere, brought back all her horrifying

memories of Msgr. Furmanski. She said that her marriage fell apart and ended in divorce because she “couldn’t . . . make love with my husband because, you know, I didn’t – I felt dirty, and he just said he couldn’t – ‘I can’t fight that ghost forever.’”

Regina said she testified to the Grand Jury mainly because she wanted to tell what Msgr. Furmanski had done and to show him she was no longer afraid. She said he had ruined her life yet felt no remorse. She hoped by telling her story, she could do her part to “just help all this go away” so that she could trust the church with her 8-year-old daughter.

### **Monsignor Furmanski abuses boys at Sacred Heart in the 1980s.**

In 2003, Archdiocese managers learned that Msgr. Furmanski had abused boys during the 1980s while pastor of Sacred Heart in Swedesburg. On September 9, 2003, victim coordinator Martin Frick received a phone call from a therapist named Sherry Rex. She reported that a client of hers – a male in his 30s – had revealed being abused by Msgr. Furmanski while an altar boy at Sacred Heart about 20 years earlier. The client told his therapist that Msgr. Furmanski had taken him into the rectory, shown him pornography, and forced him to perform oral sex on the priest.

Monsignor Furmanski admitted to abusing minors. In an October 27, 2003, memo, Msgr. Lynn wrote that Msgr. Furmanski, when confronted, had admitted to fondling “boys” in the 1980s (while he was serving as pastor at Sacred Heart). In her testimony before the Grand Jury, Regina named several altar boys from her years at Sacred Heart – the late 1970s – who were also particularly close to Msgr. Furmanski and spent a lot of time in the rectory.

### **In 1999, Monsignor Furmanski has inappropriate contact with an 11-year-old boy.**

Between 1989 and 1999, Msgr. Furmanski was assigned to four pastorates, the last, in 1998, being Saint Elizabeth Seton, Bensalem. On June 21, 1999, “Louisa,” the mother of an 11-year-old altar boy at Saint Elizabeth Seton, met with Secretary for Clergy Lynn and his assistant, Fr. Welsh. She accused Msgr. Furmanski of what was recorded as

“inappropriate behavior” with her son “Ernie.” She had been referred to Msgr. Lynn by Catholic Social Services.

Louisa had taken Ernie to see a counselor at the suggestion of his teacher at Saint Charles Borromeo grade school. The teacher had told his mother that she had observed problems with Ernie for a few months. She showed Louisa a book Ernie had destroyed by scribbling sexual-type doodles in it. In addition, his grades were failing. The teacher recommended he see a counselor.

Louisa told the Archdiocese managers that, about a month earlier, when she picked Ernie up from his job doing yard work at the rectory for Msgr. Furmanski, her son seemed strange. She told them she could tell from his eyes that something had happened. When she asked Ernie what was wrong, he told her that Msgr. Furmanski had had him massage the priest’s leg. She thought it suspicious that the priest had changed his pants – from sweatpants to shorts – since she had dropped Ernie off earlier.

On June 17, 1999, Ernie’s parents took him to Catholic Social Services where they met with a counselor, Anne Karmilowicz. They described Ernie’s recent moodiness and failing grades. The counselor then met privately with Ernie. The counselor asked, as a routine question, whether he had ever been sexually abused. In response, Ernie mentioned several incidents of massaging with Msgr. Furmanski, the pastor of his family’s parish. He told the counselor that he had told his mother about these episodes.

On June 18, 1999, Msgr. Lynn received a phone call from Maryann Adams, a clinical supervisor at Catholic Social Services. Monsignor Lynn’s notes from that conversation record that Adams referred to 11-year-old Ernie’s allegation regarding Msgr. Furmanski as “abu[se] w/one of priests.”

On June 21, 1999, Louisa explained to Msgr. Lynn and Fr. Welsh why she felt sure that more than an innocent massage had taken place. She said that Msgr. Furmanski had instructed Ernie not to tell anyone about the massage – a fact later confirmed by Msgr. Furmanski – and that the boy had felt extremely guilty for breaking his silence. Ernie had told her that the massaging had begun in the rectory kitchen but that Msgr. Furmanski had said: “This doesn’t look too good; let’s go upstairs.” Ernie reported that, once upstairs, Msgr. Furmanski lay on the floor while the boy massaged him. Louisa asked her son

whether the priest had said anything during the massage. Ernie replied: “He mumbled something like, ‘one of these days I’m going to get you down.’ But I didn’t understand what he was saying.” Over the next several weeks, between this incident and her meeting with Msgr. Lynn, Louisa learned there had been other “massage” sessions – one in a shed on church property, another in a garage attached to the kitchen.

Monsignor Lynn reported all this information to Cardinal Bevilacqua on June 24, 1999, along with Msgr. Furmanski’s admission that what was reported was true. Monsignor Lynn told the Cardinal that, “[I]t was obvious [Ernie’s mother] believes more happened” and that she mentioned the possibility of going to the police.

**The Archdiocese decides not to return Monsignor Furmanski to his position as pastor only after a parent threatens to cause scandal.**

The Archdiocese responded to the reports by Ernie and his mother in its usual way: Msgr. Furmanski was sent for a 10-day inpatient evaluation at Saint John Vianney Hospital. Also “usual” was that the information contained in the referral was incomplete, omitting crucial facts and thus making it likely that Msgr. Furmanski’s diagnosis would not be accurate. In his referral, Msgr. Lynn wrote that the priest was being sent for evaluation because he had asked an 11-year-old boy to massage his leg twice. Monsignor Lynn *failed* to mention that Msgr. Furmanski had reportedly said, “one of these days I’m going to get you down;” that the priest had ordered the boy to keep the massages a secret; and that the boy related the incidents to a counselor asking about sexual abuse.

On July 7, 1999, Msgr. Lynn announced to Louisa that “after a rigorous two week evaluation by a panel of psychologists, psychiatrists, and other experts, it was determined that Msgr. Furmanski shows no signs of any sexual disorder.” As revealed in his memo of that day’s meeting with the victim’s mother, Msgr. Lynn intended, with Cardinal Bevilacqua’s approval, to return Msgr. Furmanski to the parish.

Within the span of a few weeks, Louisa learned more from her son that caused her to change her mind about the suitability of Msgr. Furmanski’s return to the parish and to threaten to raise a public scandal; her threat changed the Archdiocese’s plans. Monsignor

Lynn wrote on July 28, 1999, that Ernie had told Louisa about “another incident that happened in a hall” and that he was “afraid to have any contact with Msgr. Furmanski.” That day, Msgr. Lynn reported to Cardinal Bevilacqua that Louisa was “very anxious and upset and said she could not understand how we could leave him there at the parish.” Monsignor Lynn warned the Cardinal that the mother “clearly stated that, if Msgr. Furmanski did not leave the parish, she would do whatever was necessary, including informing parishioners and teachers about the incidents or going to other ‘authorities’ to see that he was removed.”

On August 17, 1999, Cardinal Bevilacqua accepted Msgr. Furmanski’s resignation as pastor of Saint Elizabeth Seton. Monsignor Lynn assured the priest that this “does not rule out the possibility of a pastorate in the future.” The parish newsletter contained a short message from Msgr. Furmanski:

Dear Parishioners,

Due to illness, I have resigned as Pastor of the Parish. Your new Pastor will be assigned around the middle of September. I thank you for your many kindnesses to me.

God Bless You All,

Monsignor Leonard

In the fall of 1999, Msgr. Furmanski was assigned as Chaplain to Nazareth Hospital. He was left in that position even after Alex told the Archdiocese in the spring of 2002 about Msgr. Furmanski’s abuse of him when he was a student at Cardinal O’Hara High School.

**Saint John Vianney Hospital issues a favorable diagnosis by claiming to disbelieve one allegation and discounting another as a mere “boundary violation.”**

By keeping Msgr. Furmanski as an active priest, the Archdiocese managers ignored the obvious implication of Alex’s allegations – that Msgr. Furmanski had sexually abused boys in the past, and that he was still preying on them in 1999 when Ernie’s mother alerted Msgr. Lynn and Cardinal Bevilacqua about the priest’s behavior. Instead, Msgr. Lynn told



Alex in 2002 that he knew of no other boys with whom Msgr. Furmanski had been involved.

The Archdiocese, once again, sent the priest for an evaluation at Saint John Vianney Hospital. Despite a detailed allegation of abuse, made by a man who was not threatening to sue the Archdiocese and was clearly still ashamed about what he was reporting, Saint John Vianney's staff concluded: "[T]here was no data to suggest that Father Furmanski had sexually abused [Alex]." The October 17, 2002, report from the hospital also stated: "To our knowledge, there have been no other allegations of sexual misconduct against Father Furmanski in his ministry career." It discounted the 1999 allegation as "an instance of poor boundaries and judgment...."

Thus, by inexplicably dismissing one report of abuse and discounting another, the Archdiocese hospital gave the offender a clean bill of health. Monsignor Furmanski remained in his assignment, with the full status, faculties, and authority of a priest. Alex, having reported his story, made no further contact with the Archdiocese.

### **The priest's victim is bullied and threatened.**

In the summer of 2003, however, Alex was contacted by John Rossiter, an investigator hired by the Archdiocese's law firm, Stradley Ronon. The victim was asked to repeat his story.

At their first meeting, Alex testified, "Rossiter seemed to be extremely sympathetic and told me that I was not the only one to have complained about Msgr. Furmanski." When the investigator called him back later, however, he accused the victim of being motivated by money. Rossiter said he did not believe Alex and was going to "finalize the report and have the matter against Furmanski dropped."

Alex told the Grand Jury that he had never contacted a lawyer and never contemplated suing the Archdiocese. He said he believed that any claim he might once have had was barred by the statute of limitations. After his initial report to Archdiocese

managers, informing them that one of their still active priests had sexually assaulted him as an adolescent, he never contacted the Archdiocese again.

Whether Rossiter really disbelieved Alex or not (Rossiter testified: “I don’t think there’s been but one or two [victims] where I didn’t believe their allegation, at least their perception of it”), he had obtained information that could be used to intimidate and pressure the victim. Alex, who had years before worked as an insurance adjuster, had been prosecuted for using funds he was holding in escrow to pay some hospital bills. He had received a work-release sentence and repaid the escrow fund.

Nevertheless, on behalf of the Archdiocese’s lawyers, Rossiter called Alex’s wife and asked her whether her employer – the juvenile court system in Delaware County – knew of her husband’s conviction. Alex testified that Rossiter suggested to his wife that if the victim continued with his allegation, the wife’s employer would find out about his conviction. Rossiter told her it could affect her employment.

Alex reiterated to Rossiter and the Grand Jury that he didn’t understand why he was being treated this way. He had never threatened to sue the Archdiocese – he had merely told its managers that one of its current priests had abused him.

On September 9, 2003, before Rossiter was able to “finalize his report” *exonerating* Msgr. Furmanski, the Archdiocese received therapist Sherry Rex’s report that a client of hers had been abused by Msgr. Furmanski in the 1980s. Rossiter was sent to question Msgr. Furmanski about this new allegation, as well as Alex’s.

**Monsignor Furmanski is sent for treatment a third time and is eventually recommended for removal by the Archdiocesan Review Board.**

On October 27, 2003, Msgr. Lynn wrote in a memo that Msgr. Furmanski, in his interview with Rossiter, had denied Alex’s allegation, “but admitted to fondling boys in the 1980s.” Monsignor Lynn noted that Rossiter “did not push for more information at that time but immediately called James Bock, Associate to the Vicar for Administration....”

The interview with Msgr. Furmanski was continued by Msgr. Lynn’s assistant, Fr. Vincent Welsh. As reported by Msgr. Lynn, Msgr. Furmanski’s admission to Fr. Welsh

was “that he fondled a minor in the 1980s.” There is no further mention in Msgr. Lynn’s memo of the additional victims indicated by Msgr. Furmanski’s use of the plural – boys – in his admission to Rossiter. Nor is there any recording of the number or names of the abused minors or precisely what type of abuse they suffered.

Msgr. Furmanski was sent on October 23, 2003, to Saint John Vianney for the third time. On December 17, 2003, the Archdiocesan Review Board found Msgr. Furmanski in violation of the Church’s “Essential Norms” defining sexual abuse of a minor and recommended that he be removed from ministry. His name was made public, along with those of three other priests removed that day.

In the course of its investigation of known allegations against the priest, the Review Board stated that Msgr. Furmanski confessed to two “incidents of sexual abuse of minors regarding children about whom we had not previously received allegations.” The Review Board did not identify these two victims or describe their abuse, but the board did suggest that the Archdiocese’s “victim’s services staff should consider what, if any, outreach would be appropriate to the victims identified in Msgr. Furmanski’s admissions since they have not come forward themselves.” There is no indication in records turned over by the Archdiocese that these known victims were ever contacted or that Msgr. Furmanski’s crimes against them were reported to the appropriate civil authorities.

Monsignor Furmanski was released from Saint John Vianney on January 31, 2004. He was permitted to retire – still a priest – to his home on the New Jersey Shore.

On October 15, 2004, faced with the possibility of involuntary laicization, Msgr. Furmanski agreed to live “a supervised life of prayer and penance” at Villa Saint Joseph, a retirement home for priests.

Monsignor Furmanski appeared before the Grand Jury and was given an opportunity to answer questions concerning the allegations against him. He chose not to do so.