

PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
ATTORNEY GENERAL KATHLEEN G. KANE

Press Release

Grand jury: Conspiracy involving 3 religious leaders allowed sexual abuse of more than 80 children

3/15/2016

JOHNSTOWN — Three religious leaders were criminally charged today for taking part in an alleged conspiracy that allowed more than 80 victims to be sexually abused by Stephen Baker, a proven child predator, and put hundreds of other children in danger.

The charges against Giles A. Schinelli, 73, Robert J. D'Aversa, 69, and Anthony M. Criscitelli, 61, were announced today by Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen G. Kane, who addressed the media at a news conference at the University of Pittsburgh's Johnstown campus.

"These men knew there was a child predator in their organization. Yet they continued to put him in positions where he had countless opportunities to prey upon children," Attorney General Kane said. "Their silence resulted in immeasurable pain and suffering for so many victims. These men turned a blind eye to the innocent children they were trusted to protect."

Schinelli, D'Aversa and Criscitelli are members of the Franciscan Friars, Third Order Regulars, Province of the Immaculate Conception, which is based in Hollidaysburg, Blair County. They are each charged with one count each of endangering the welfare of children and criminal conspiracy.

The three men all served as ministers provincial for the Third Order Regulars, or T.O.R., meaning they had exclusive and total control over the assignment of personnel within the organization. In other words, they made the final call on where to assign Baker, who was officially assigned for eight years to Bishop McCort Catholic High School.

The Office of Attorney General spent two years investigating the allegations surrounding Baker, whose 2013 death was ruled a suicide. The office's investigators in April 2014 took the matter to a statewide investigating grand jury, which heard testimony from a number of witnesses and reviewed more than 200 exhibits.

The grand jury [issued a presentment recommending the criminal charges filed today](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2285&Action=Follow+Link) (<http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2285&Action=Follow+Link>).

The jurors found the three ministers provincial engaged in efforts to protect the image and reputation of the T.O.R. instead of acting in the best interests of the children in their care. The grand jury also found leaders of the organization knew in 1988 of a sexual abuse allegation involving Baker. Yet he was assigned to Bishop McCort in 1992 and allowed to be in contact with children without a forewarning to school officials.

The filing of the criminal charges comes two weeks after Attorney General Kane released the grand jury's other findings — a 147-page report that detailed the sexual abuse hundreds of children endured for decades at the hands of religious leaders and priests associated with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.

Attorney General Kane stressed the grand jury's review of the Baker matter revealed conduct similar to that detailed in the grand jury's report. Documentation proved leaders of the T.O.R. on at least eight occasions transferred Franciscan Friars within their organization to other locations following sexual abuse allegations involving children, the grand jury found.

"The evidence shows the organization's leaders acted callously when dealing with members accused of sexual abuse," Kane said. "No reports were ever made to law enforcement. As the grand jury found, the ultimate priority was to avoid public scrutiny at all costs."

Baker alleged to have groped victims as Bishop McCort athletic trainer

The grand jury learned that Baker was assigned in 1992 to Bishop McCort Catholic High School. He taught religion and worked as an athletic trainer for the school's sports programs. Baker was assigned to the school until 2000. For several years thereafter, he regularly returned to participate in school events. Victims further stated that Baker had access to Bishop McCort facilities until 2010.

Baker is accused of molesting more than 80 children from Bishop McCort between 1992 and 2010.

Baker was allowed to "treat" children as an athletic trainer despite no formal training in the field of sports medicine. Victim statements detailed incidents involving Baker in which he would grope the genitals of male children and digitally penetrate their anuses, the grand jury found.

The alleged conduct often occurred on the grounds of Bishop McCort and a related training facility. Two victims reported they were sexually assaulted

on the Bishop McCort grounds after Baker was officially removed from the school.

The grand jury reviewed evidence obtained during the execution of a search warrant on the grounds of the Saint Bernardine Monastery in Hollidaysburg. Documents recovered during the search showed the T.O.R. knew in 1988 of a sexual abuse allegation involving Baker.

Schinelli, the minister provincial from 1986 to 1994, sent Baker for a psychological evaluation and was told Baker was not to have one-on-one contact with children, but nonetheless later assigned him to Bishop McCort, where he had regular contact with children, the grand jury found.

D'Aversa, the minister provincial from 1994 to 2002, allegedly failed to notify school officials and law enforcement of the reason that Baker was removed from the school in 2000. His removal followed what D'Aversa believed was a new, credible allegation of child sexual abuse, according to the grand jury. D'Aversa later appointed Baker vocations director of the T.O.R.

Under this appointment, Baker conducted overnight youth retreats throughout the United States. Baker in 2008 was assigned as a volunteer trainer at Mt. Aloysius College. His position allowed him to sexually offend three additional children, the grand jury discovered. The grand jurors found this abuse occurred because Baker was kept in active ministry, which allowed him to engage the public.

Criscitelli, the minister provincial from 2002 to 2010, further allowed Baker access to children by allowing him to work at a shopping mall. He also knew Baker required "safety plans" advising no contact with minors, yet Criscitelli signed such plans while residing in Minnesota. Meanwhile, Baker lived unsupervised in Pennsylvania. He also lived at one time with another accused child predator, the grand jury found.

The grand jury also reviewed evidence that Baker in the 1980s molested at least a dozen students while assigned as a teacher and sports trainer at a high school in Ohio.

The grand jury further learned the T.O.R.'s leaders had considerable experience in hiding members of the organization who were accused of sexual abuse. The evidence allegedly showed the allegations of abuse were never reported to law enforcement.

Instead, the accused members were transferred to other locations throughout the country. Meanwhile, the T.O.R.'s leaders were routinely in contact with attorneys and insurance companies to assess liability and potential payouts related to sexual abuse victims, the grand jury stated.

Hotline remains active for victims of abuse

Schinelli, D'Aversa and Criscitelli all live out of state. Investigators expect their preliminary arraignments to be scheduled in the coming days.

The Office of Attorney General assumed jurisdiction of this matter upon a formal conflict referral by Cambria County District Attorney Kelly Callihan. The matter was presented to the grand jury and will be prosecuted by Deputy Attorney General Daniel J. Dye of the Office of Attorney General's Criminal Prosecutions Section. The office's Bureau of Criminal Investigations also spent a significant amount of time gathering the evidence that was presented to the grand jury.

The Attorney General's investigators also were aided greatly by behavioral experts with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Critical Incident Response Group, Behavioral Analysis Unit.

Attorney General Kane thanked all who took part in the investigation for their commitment and hard work.

The Office of Attorney General earlier this month established a hotline — 888-538-8541 — for people to submit information related to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. Attorney General Kane encouraged people with information relating to Baker and the T.O.R. to call the hotline. It is being manned by investigators who have worked directly on the case.

"It is our hope that people with information will continue to reach out to us," Attorney General Kane said. "As we have stressed in recent weeks, this is an ongoing investigation. One call could provide a new investigative lead. At the same time, it is our hope that we have created an avenue for the victims who have lived with this pain for years to come forward."

(A person charged with a crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty.)

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Supplemental materials :

[Grand jury presentment \(http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2284&Action=Follow+Link\)](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2284&Action=Follow+Link)

[Schinelli complaint \(http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2283&Action=Follow+Link\)](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2283&Action=Follow+Link)

[D'Aversa complaint \(http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2282&Action=Follow+Link\)](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2282&Action=Follow+Link)

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https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/Media_and_Resources/Press_Releases/Press_Release/?pid=2361

[Aversa complaint \(http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2282&Action=Follow+Link)

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[Crisitelli complaint \(http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2281&Action=Follow+Link)

[Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2281&Action=Follow+Link\)](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2281&Action=Follow+Link)

[Timeline created by FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit \(http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?](http://paofficeofattorneygeneral.pr-optout.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d80%3c3%3d%26JDG%3c%3a7%403869%26SDG%3c90%3a.&RE=IN&RI=711446&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=2280&Action=Follow+Link)

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