

The Case of Father William Presley

Known Assignments

05/1956 - 06/1965	St. Cosmas and Damian, Punxsutawney
06/1965 - 08/1970	Elk County Christian High School, St. Marys
05/1971 - 08/1971	Immaculate Conception, Brookville
05/1972 - 08/1971	Our Lady Queen of the Americas, Conneaut Lake
08/1970 - 06/1976	Leave of Absence, Graduate and Student Counselor, Notre Dame, Indiana
06/1976 - 06/1977	Leave of Absence, St. Joseph University, Philadelphia
06/1977 - 06/1978	Leave of Absence, Campus Minister, University of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland
06/1978 - 08/1981	St. Therese, Shinglehouse
06/1971 - 08/1981	Sacred Heart Mission, Genesee
08/1981 - 03/1983	Leave of Absence, Parish Ministry in Raleigh, North Carolina
03/1983 - 03/1988	St. Agnes, Morrisdale (three separate assignments)
03/1988 - 04/1990	Leave of Absence, Outside the Diocese
04/1990 - 07/2000	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sykesville (three separate assignments)
07/2000	Retired in Lancaster (Diocese of Harrisburg)

The Diocese of Erie was first apprised of Father William Presley's sexual abuses as early as November 1987, during his assignment as Pastor of St. Agnes. These sexual abuses, as reported to the Diocese, involved two victims and spanned nearly sixteen years. One of the victims had been abused as recently as 1986; the second victim was abused prior to 1971 when he was a high school student in another parish.

Between February and May 1988, various meetings or discussions were held between Presley and Diocesan officials. Fathers John Rosenhamer, A. Joseph Book, Joseph Bobal, Glen Whitman, John Beal, and Bishop Michael Murphy participated in the review of the complaints. The Diocese noted that Presley did not directly deny the allegations. However, Diocesan memoranda obtained by the Grand Jury recorded the Diocese's negative view of the complaining victims. Documents regularly referred to the victims as "troubled" or having psychological

“problems.” Indeed, it was noted that one victim may have been the victim of a previous sexual assault by a family member.

During the course of the counseling, Bill learns that she has read over 400 of these trashy, romantic novels, and that she fantasises about everything. The girl, obviously, to me, Fr. Book, has psychological problems. That's one element of the story.

An Excerpt of a Diocesan Memo Regarding a Victim

There was a consensus amongst diocesan officials that Presley was extremely violent and predisposed to assaultive behavior. On May 16, 1988, Bobal wrote a letter to Murphy containing his recollection of a meeting with Presley. He confirmed that Presley had given the teenaged female victim a job and had obtained other items for her, including clothing and money. He also noted the possibility that Presley would become violent. The meeting concluded with a request that Presley undergo a psychological evaluation. Presley ultimately refused the evaluation but agreed to see another doctor at the recommendation of the Diocese.

Immaculate Conception Church

408 Stone Street
Osceola Mills, PA 16666

May 16, 1988

Most Rev. Michael J. Murphy, P.D., S.T.L.
Bishop of Erie
205 W. 9th St.
Erie, Pa. 16501

Dear Bishop Murphy,

In response to a request made by Father A. Joseph Beck I am writing my recollections of a meeting held at Immaculate Conception rectory on Thursday, Feb. 18, 1988 at 11:00am. Present at the meeting were Fathers John Rosenhamer, William Prasley and myself. Father Rosenhamer and Father Prasley did all of the talking. I was there mainly because we knew of Bill's propensity toward anger and we were concerned about the possibility of his becoming violent.

As we sat down, Father Rosenhamer began by telling Bill of his talks with [redacted] and he (Fr. Ro.) read through a list of things she had accused Bill of. These accusations were about sexual conduct with her. Bill sat there listening to Fr. Rosenhamer until he was finished with occasional comment on his part. Then he said something to the effect of -- "Do you want to hear my side now" and I believe John said "yes".

Bill then began to describe his association with [redacted]

- a- How she came to him for money.
- b- How he offered her part time work as a secretary.
- c- How she always seemed to want or need more money.
- d- How he increased her hours of work.
- e- How he worked to get her a scholarship at St Francis College.
- f- How he went shopping for clothes for her.
- g- about her dating some fellow now who was the possible cause of her dropping out of school.

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He denied having sexual intercourse with her and also denied several times the accusation of any sexual involvement of [REDACTED] with her. There may have been other comments made which I can't remember now.

After this, Bill asked John what he wanted him to do and John said he wanted him to go up to Saint Georges for the weekend and then he would be taken to St. Louis - I think - for evaluation. Then at this point, I believe, Bill said "Do I get to see the Bishop" and I believe that John's response was not until after the evaluation. There was some discussion on the length of time required for the evaluation and Bill kind of balked at the amount of time that he would be away but then he said that he would go - that he owed it to Bishop Murphy to go thru the evaluation.

I am not sure of the sequence here but it seemed that they began to cover the same ground over again but this time Bill gave a detailed and graphic history of [REDACTED] life as he knew it - how she was mistreated and abused by her grandfather. After this I think John restated what he wanted Bill to do and Bill said something about the possible outcome of the evaluation and then said "I've worked too hard for what I have and I won't give it up. I'll get a lawyer." and John said that he thought that he should. Bill also talked about his dogs. He said that he wouldn't give them up since they were a sort of therapy for him. I believe that somewhere along here Bill said, "I want to see the Bishop" and I believe that John said we want you to go for evaluation first. Somewhere in this dialogue Bill said that he respected his vow of celibacy and that the whole conversation was extremely embarrassing to him. (146)

In the end he did promise to go back to the parish and get things lined up for him to go up to St. George's and then on to St. Louis for evaluation. Father Rosenhamer said that he would be at St Agnes and St Severin churches for the weekend.

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He said that he would simply tell them that Father Presley was on a health leave. As he was leaving, I told Bill to either let me know or write down what his weekday schedule for Masses was and any other details he might want to leave for us so that Father Mastrian and I could maintain things for him until he got back. Bill left and then called me that afternoon or the next day to check out Mass schedules for the bulletin.

Again, Bishop, I have to admit that I am not at all positive about the sequence of everything written here and that there were other things said that I could not recall but what is here are my recollections of that afternoon's meeting.

Respectfully Yours in Christ,

Joseph K. Bobal

c. -Very Rev. A. Joseph Book E.V.

c. - Rev. John P. Beal, J.C.D. Judicial Vicar

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The Bobal Letter

Following an evaluation in April 1990, Murphy placed Presley in a temporary assignment. That assignment was made permanent in June 1990. Shortly thereafter, Trautman allowed Presley to remain in his position as Pastor and Administrator at the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Sykesville, Jefferson County. In April 1996, Trautman appointed Presley to a new six-year term as Administrator of this Church, where Father Presley remained until his retirement in 2000.

In January 2002, an article detailing the practice of reassigning priests accused of sexual abuse of children was published in the *Boston Globe*. In April 2002, three separate victims notified Trautman of sexual abuse perpetrated upon them by Presley from 1963 to 1974. One of the victims was as young as 13 years old when it occurred. The abuse of these individuals consisted of “choking, slapping, punching, rape, sodomy, fellatio, anal intercourse,” and other acts according to Diocesan records reviewed by the Grand Jury. On April 18, 2002, Trautman contacted Presley by telephone. Trautman recorded that, during that call, Presley admitted the sexual abuse of the victims. Trautman revoked Presley’s priestly faculties later that year.

In April 2003, and in response to media inquiries about Presley, the Diocese of Erie issued a press release stating, among other things, that Presley’s priestly faculties were removed in July 2002 shortly after the allegations prompted the Diocese to conduct an internal investigation. The Diocese stated that Trautman’s understanding of the alleged incidents was that the crimes had occurred 28 years ago during the time of the late Bishop Watson. The Diocese explained that the individual making the allegation was twenty years old at the time and enrolled at a college in another state where the incidents were reported to have occurred. The Diocese told the public that it had “no information to provide on other possible allegations against the priest.”

This press release was false and misleading. Trautman had personal knowledge of at least three victims, one as young as 13, who reported their abuse to him in 2002. Only one victim was an out-of-state college student. Moreover, the Diocese was aware of sexual abuse complaints against Presley as early as 1987 but permitted him to stay in active ministry for another thirteen years. Additionally, Diocesan records showed that Presley was so violent that priests who interacted with him were concerned for their safety.

Later that year, Trautman communicated with the Vatican and outlined additional details with respect to sexual abuse committed by Presley. Trautman cited information provided by a doctor who was counseling one of Presley's victims, the same doctor who counseled Presley in 1988. Trautman reported that the information "...confirms my suspicion that there are even more victims of the sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by Presley."

By 2005, the Diocese was actively engaged in an attempt to formally remove Presley from the priesthood. In the course of that effort, personnel for the Diocese interviewed other witnesses or associates of Presley and identified numerous additional victims or potential victims. Monsignor Mark Bartchak led the investigation. Several of these individuals stated that they informed the Diocese of their concerns in the 1980's, including a report to a parish council member, who stated that Presley would not allow anyone else inside the rectory when certain children were present and that some of these children spent the night with him on multiple occasions.

Bartchak also re-interviewed the male victim who had previously disclosed his abuse to the Diocese in 1982, 1987, and 2002. He explained that Presley invited him to his rectory after befriending him. Presley then tried to hypnotize him before assaulting him. Presley took him on trips to New York and Yosemite. Presley brought other children on some of these trips, including

one occasion when he tried to abuse both the victim and another high school student at the same time. Presley taught the victim how to have sexual intercourse by bringing in a female high school student and using index cards to show them where to touch each other. On more than one occasion, Presley gave him some type of a sedative to relax him prior to abusing him. Presley stated that it was okay “because he was a priest” and used his position as a spiritual guide to further the abuse.

On August 25, 2005, Bartchak sent a confidential memo to Trautman that detailed the results of his interviews to date. Bartchak stated the following: “I was not surprised to learn from other witnesses from the Elk County area, that there are likely to be other victims” and that “... several more witnesses who could attest to the brutality that they were subjected to by Father Presley.” Bartchak asked, “It is likely that there may be others who were also of the age for the offenses to be considered delicts, but to what end is it necessary to follow every lead?” He sought Trautman’s opinion, asking:

Is it worth the further harm and scandal that might occur if this is all brought up again? I am asking you how you want me to proceed. With due regard for the potential for more harm to individuals and for more scandal, should I continue to follow up on potential leads?

Four days later Bartchak documented a meeting earlier that day with Trautman, in which he stated:

Bishop Trautman decided that in order to preclude further scandal, these additional witnesses should not be contacted, especially given the fact that is not likely that they will lead to information concerning delicts involving minors under 16 years of age.

In 2006, Trautman made a confidential, formal request to the Vatican in support of Presley’s laicization. The Grand Jury reviewed similar requests in Dioceses throughout Pennsylvania. Often called “The Acts” of the subject priest, the summaries were often the most detailed documents within Diocesan records and contained decades of long-held secrets only

disclosed in an effort finally to remove an offending priest from the priesthood. The “Acts” of Presley stated, in part:

Presley is a violent man....He managed to work his will and way by fear, intimidation, charm and deception, all the classic signs of a hardcore predator. How he managed to escape for so many years defies reason and understanding.

His behavior was carefully planned behavior....Victimization didn't happen spontaneously; it was programmed, masterfully designed, almost perfectly executed.

Given the pattern of behavior over his years in ministry, I believe that Presley constitutes a threat to others.

Presley's abuse has had a rippling effect on the spiritual, mental and emotional lives of his victims.....Presley's case has been made public by way of the printed media – causing scandal among the Christian Faithful.

He manipulated families to welcome him into their homes and worked to garner the approval of parents. He then used this privileged position to solicit sexual acts with the children.

Father Presley's behaviors of manipulating families into giving him their trust and grooming their children for engaging in sexual acts continued and improved as he moved to other assignments.

In the course of these proceedings to remove Presley, the Bishop of Harrisburg, Kevin Rhoades, provided a statement. He acknowledged that Presley had moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania after his retirement in 2000. Rhoades wrote that his predecessor, Bishop Nicholas Dattilo, was personally aware of this matter and that more information regarding the violent behavior of Presley had come to light since Presley moved to the Diocese of Harrisburg. Further, the letter stated that “were this information to become known, especially in the light of his offers of public assistance at Mass in several parishes, great public scandal would arise within this diocese.”

On July 13, 2006, Trautman wrote to the Lancaster County District Attorney. His letter stated that Presley was now defrocked and that the Diocese had received “credible allegations

regarding sexual misconduct with a minor which allegedly occurred many years ago.” Trautman falsely wrote, “We were unaware of these allegations until they came to light only a few years ago. As a result, no criminal charges were ever brought forward because the statute of limitations had expired.” The truth was that Murphy, Trautman, and the Diocese of Erie intentionally waited out the statute of limitations and curbed their own investigation to prevent finding additional victims.

The Grand Jury finds that the failure of the Diocese of Erie and of Murphy and Trautman to aggressively pursue the removal of Presley in a timely fashion had left Presley cloaked in the authority and respect of the priesthood. Moreover, the lack of transparency and candor with respect to the concerns surrounding Presley only aided seamless insertion into another Catholic community. Presley, a priest Trautman would eventually describe as a “hardcore predator,” had escaped to a new region of Pennsylvania.



DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG — Office of the Bishop

4800 Union Deposit Road — Box 2153 • Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-2153
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Votum of the Bishop of Harrisburg

Prot. N. 242/2003
Rev. William F. Presley

Your Eminence, Cardinal William Levada:

Permit me this opportunity to offer an opinion in the matter of Rev. William F. Presley, a priest of the Diocese of Erie, in a case concerning the commission of a *gravius delictus*, namely the sexual abuse of a minor.

I was ordained and installed as Bishop of Harrisburg on December 9, 2004. My predecessor, Bishop Nicholas C. Dattilo, was personally aware of and directly involved in this matter.

Following his admission of the sexual abuse of a minor, Father Presley moved to the area of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, within the Diocese of Harrisburg. This occurred in the Summer of the year 2000. My predecessor learned of this from priests of the area, because of Father Presley's assistance to the parishes of the Lancaster area.

Upon inquiry, it was learned that Father Presley left his diocese of incardination following an admission of sexual abuse of a minor, and the sexual abuse with force and threats of multiple other persons. At the time, Bishop Donald Trautman of the Diocese of Erie was under the impression that Father Presley had voluntarily assumed a life of prayer and penance, refraining from public ministry or the public celebration of the sacraments.

Bishop Trautman wrote the following to Bishop Dattilo on May 6, 2002:

Dear Bishop Dattilo,

I wish to inform you that Rev. William F. Presley, a 73 year old retired priest of the Diocese of Erie who is currently residing at 1606 Sunset Avenue, Lancaster, PA 16701, no longer enjoys the faculties of the Diocese of Erie. In view of recent conversations with him, he has voluntarily decided not to assist in the public celebration of the sacraments or in preaching in the Lancaster area. Nevertheless, I want you to be informed that he does not have the faculties of the Diocese of Erie any longer. I am fully confident that he will not attempt to exercise any ministry in your diocese.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman
Bishop of Erie*

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Conversations between curial officials of this diocese with members of the curia of the Diocese of Erie confirmed the history of sexual abuse which Father Presley exhibited, and also that he was not to exercise ministry in any public forum.

It is a source of grave concern to me, as it was to my predecessor, that Father Presley misrepresented to his own diocesan bishop that he had voluntarily assumed a life of prayer and penance, and had voluntarily withdrawn from public ministry.

More information regarding the violent behavior of Father William F. Presley toward many victims of his disordered sexual appetite has come to light since he moved to the Diocese of Harrisburg. Were this information to become known, especially in light of his offers of public assistance at Mass in several parishes, great public scandal would arise within this diocese.

It is also of grave concern to me that Father Presley has not only prevaricated to his diocesan bishop regarding his lifestyle past and present, but in so doing has obviously not withdrawn from contumacy. His lengthy history of sexual misconduct in violation of his promise of clerical celibacy and perpetual continence, his deliberate misrepresentation of the truth to the bishop to whom he promised respect and obedience, and the grisly nature of his many sexual acts even beyond the one known *gravius delictus* committed with a minor, all combine to suggest to me as the ordinary of the place where he now resides, that Bishop Trautman's request is reasonable and necessary. Dismissal from the clerical state may be the only means of removing a sexual predator from the ranks of the priesthood. His age is not necessarily an obstacle to his sexual misconduct, given his history.

As long as Father William F. Presley remains in the clerical state, I harbor fear for the People of God within the Diocese of Harrisburg. I fear that his possession of the clerical state will allow him a means of continuing his pattern of carefully insinuating himself into the lives of others as a prelude to violence and sexual misconduct. Further, I believe that his own contumacy, and his denial of the seriousness of his behavior, may be intransigent until an action as serious as dismissal from the clerical state awakens within him a semblance of repentance.

Given in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, this fifth day of April 2006.

+ *Kevin C. Rhoades*

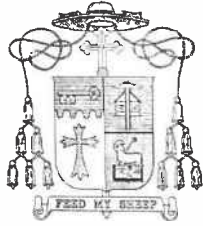
Bishop of Harrisburg

In testimony whereof...

Carol J. Houghton
Chancellor

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The Statement of Bishop Rhoades



Office of the Bishop

*Diocese of Erie
P.O. Box 10397
Erie, Pennsylvania 16514-0397*

July 13, 2006

County of Lancaster
District Attorney's Office
50 N. Duke Street
P.O. Box 83480
Lancaster, PA 17608-3480

Dear District Attorney Totaro,

I am writing to you to confirm the information which you received in a letter from the Diocese of Harrisburg dated June 23, 2006 concerning William F. Presley. He is a priest of the Diocese of Erie who recently moved to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Our records indicate that Mr. Presley currently resides at 1606 Sunset Avenue in Lancaster.

Mr. Presley was suspended by me several years ago for credible allegations regarding sexual misconduct with a minor which allegedly occurred many years ago. We were unaware of these allegations until they came to light only a few years ago. As a result, no criminal charges were ever brought forward because the statute of limitations had expired. I would also like to update you to that fact that by means of an administrative decree dated June 10, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI has ordered that the penalty of dismissal from the clerical state be imposed upon William F. Presley. Consequently, we now consider Mr. Presley to be defrocked.

If you have any questions or if I can be of any help to you, please do not hesitate to let me know. In the meantime, be assured of my prayers.

Sincerely yours,

The Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, S.T.D., S.S.L.
Bishop of Erie

cc: The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Harrisburg

/eml

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Trautman's Letter to the Lancaster County District Attorney