Diocese of Allentown: Clergy Credibly Accused of Abuse

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Living Priests

Bender, Thomas J.

- Suspended in 1988. Laicized in 2005. Bender pled guilty to Corruption of Minors and Indecent Assault, and was sentenced to probation for 7 years and ordered to refrain from exercising priestly ministry by the Court of Common Pleas of Berks County. In 1988, the Diocese attempted to laicize Bender. In 2005, Bender was laicized. In 2006, Bender pled guilty to felony charges of attempting to disseminate indecent material to a minor and misdemeanor charges of attempted criminal sex act and attempted child endangerment. Bender was sentenced to 10 years in prison and lifetime probation. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Benestad, Thomas J.

- Retired in 2009. The Diocese attempted to laicize Benestad on two occasions, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (a Vatican office) found that there was not enough evidence to dismiss him from the clerical state. Benestad now resides within the Diocese of Palm Beach. The Diocese of Allentown has not authorized Benestad to engage in active ministry in the Diocese of Palm Beach or any other diocese. Benestad was advised in writing that he cannot present himself as a priest. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Flanagan, Bernard A.

- Removed in 2010. The Diocese attempted to laicize Flanagan, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (a Vatican office) found that the allegation could not be prosecuted, and therefore, laicization was not possible. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Fromholzer, Francis J.

- Removed in 2002. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Galko, Joseph D.

- Removed in 1987. Laicized in 2010. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Giuliani, Richard J.

- Removed in 1977. Request for laicization is in process. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Kean, Joseph H.

- Removed in 2002. Laicized in 2007. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Kuzmann, Robert J.

- Removed in 2006. Laicized in 2015. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Lonergan, Kevin M.

- Removed in 2018. Laicized in 2021. He served two years in prison after pleading guilty to indecent assault of a 17-year-old girl, and is required to register as a sex offender under Megan's Law until 2035.

Mraz, John S.

- Removed in 2016. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement. In 2017, Mraz was sentenced to 6 to 23 months in prison related to viewing child pornography and is required to register as a sex offender under Megan's Law until 2032.

Puza, Paul G.

- Removed in 2002. Laicized in 2010. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Tucci, Bruno M.

- Removed in 2002. Laicized in 2007. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Yarrosh, Ronald J.

- Removed in 2004. Laicized in 2007. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement. In 2005, Yarrosh pled guilty to sexual abuse of children, theft, receiving stolen property and criminal use of a communication facility. Yarrosh was sentenced to 10 years probation related to possession of child pornography. In 2010, Yarrosh violated the terms of his probation; as a result, Yarrosh's probation was revoked, and he was sentenced to 4 to 10 years in prison.

Deceased Priests

Baruch, John S.

- Retired in 1984 and died in 1995. Baruch was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Cofenas, Robert G.

- Removed in 2000, laicized in 2005, and died in 2013. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Coleman, Edward W.

- Died in 2007. Coleman was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Fink, Felix C.

- Died in 1966. Fink was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Ford, Richard J.

- Died in 2005. Ford was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Forish, Stephen T.

- Removed in 2003 and died in 2006. The allegation was reported to law enforcement.

Gaffney, James F.

- Removed in 2002. Laicized in 2015 and died in 2024. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Ganster, Edward G.

- Removed in 1988, laicized in 1990, and died in 2014. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Gillespie, Francis T.

- Removed in 2002 and died in 2017. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Graff, Edward R.

- Retired from the Diocese of Allentown in 1992. Subsequent to his retirement, Graff resumed ministry in the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas. Graff retired from the Diocese of Amarillo in 2002. He died in 2002. At the time of his death, Graff was incarcerated in Texas. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Halabura, Stephen J.

- Retired in 2008, removed in 2019, and died in 2023. Father Halabura self-reported an incident of abuse in 2019 and the Diocese notified law enforcement.

Houseknecht, Leo J.

- Died in 1990. Houseknecht was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The allegation was contained in a civil law suit, which was filed with a court.

Hulko, Joseph D.

- Removed in 2003 and died in 2022. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Jones, William E.

- Removed in 2002 and died in 2004. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Kerestus, Thomas J.

- Removed in 2002 and died in 2014. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Kopec, Bronislaus J.

- Died in 1968. Kopec was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Lawrence III, Michael S.

- Removed in 2002 and died in 2015. The Diocese attempted to laicize Lawrence on two occasions, but on both occasions, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (a Vatican office) denied the requests. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Maslar, William J.

- Removed in 2002 and died in 2005.

Mathis, Joseph L.

- Died in 1981. Mathis was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

McHale, James J.

- Died in 1997. Diocesan records indicate that McHale was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

McNelis, Francis J.

- Removed in 2002 and died in 2005. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Mihalak, James J.

- Removed in 1997. The Diocese attempted to laicize Mihalik, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (a Vatican office) found that the allegation could not be prosecuted, and therefore, laicization was not possible. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Rigney, Dennis A.

- Retired in 2002. Removed in 2003. Died in 2024. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Rock, Joseph A.

- Removed in 2001. Laicized in 2005. Died in 2024. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Royer, Gerald J.

- Laicized in 1965 and died in 2003. The alleged abuse occurred prior to the formation of the Diocese of Allentown, but occurred within the geographic confines of what is now known as the Diocese of Allentown. The allegation was reported to law enforcement and to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Ruffenach, Charles J.

- Retired in 1979 and died in 1980. Ruffenach was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Sabas, John P.

- Removed in 1991 and died in 1996. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Shields, William J.

- Removed in 1995 and died in 2000. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Shigo, Stephen F.

- Died in 1991. Shigo was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Soderlund, David A.

- Removed in 1989, laicized in 2005, and died in 2020. In 2010, Soderlund was sentenced to 5 years in a Wyoming State prison for conviction related to child pornography. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Strassner, Henry E.

- Retired in 2003 and died in 2009. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Ulincy, Andrew A.

- Removed in 2010 and died in 2016. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Zmijewski, Joseph A.

- Died in 1968. Zmijewski was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The Diocese reported the allegation to law enforcement.

Zolondek, John G.

- Died in 1962. Zolondek was deceased at the time the allegation was reported to the Diocese. The allegation was reported to law enforcement.

Note on “Laicization”

When a priest is “laicized,” it means that he has been dismissed from the Priesthood and no longer has the rights, obligations, and privileges of the Priesthood. It is sometimes referred to as being “defrocked.” Only the Pope can laicize a priest. A Bishop petitions the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, a Vatican office, which considers the matter and recommends to the Holy Father whether or not to grant the request for laicization.