

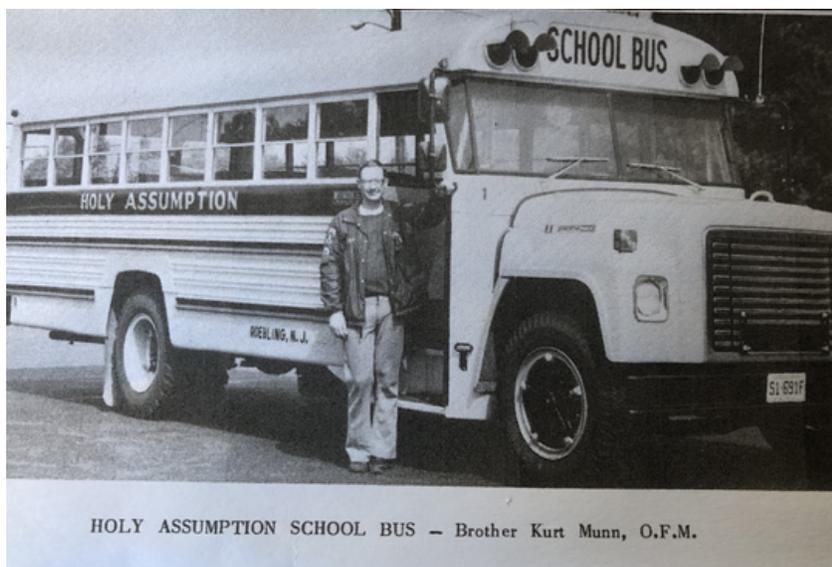
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'He got away with it. That ends today.' DeWitt man named as sexual abuser in New Jersey lawsuit

Megan Banta, Lansing State Journal Published 10:00 p.m. ET Dec. 10, 2019 | Updated 10:18 p.m. ET Dec. 10, 2019

DEWITT – To people in DeWitt, Kurt Munn has been a firefighter and an active member of the Knights of Columbus.

To Todd Kostrub, he'll forever be the man who "basically took my soul" nearly 50 years ago.



Kurt Munn, a former Franciscan brother, was a bus driver at the school Todd Kostrub attended as a child. (Photo: Courtesy Jeff Anderson and Associates)

Kostrub accused Munn of sexually assaulting him for about a decade beginning in 1972 — when he was a 7-year-old altar boy at Holy Assumption in Roebling, New Jersey.

"There are still parts of me that were taken from me that I'll never get back," Kostrub said.

By the time Kostrub came to terms with the abuse and reported it to New Jersey State Police, who produced a 27-page report in the late 1990s, it was too late to file criminal charges even though Munn admitted to the abuse when police questioned him.

Decades later, a new law in New Jersey has allowed Kostrub to file a civil lawsuit. He filed a complaint on Dec. 2 in Mercer County, New Jersey, alleging leaders in the Catholic church and a sub-sect of the Franciscan Friars, a religious order of which Munn was a member, failed to protect him and others from sexual abuse. Munn was a Franciscan brother; he is not an ordained priest.

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Kostrub said his goal is to make it impossible for Munn and the church leaders who enabled him to hide.

"He got away with it," Kostrub said. "That ends today."

Munn, 73, did not respond to multiple interview requests, including a voicemail, an email and a written note left on his front door.

Abuse started at 7 years old

Kostrub was a 7-year-old altar boy at Holy Assumption when he says the abuse started.

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Munn was head of the altar boys at the time. He was also Kostrub's baseball and basketball coach and a bus driver for the school.

Kostrub saw Munn every day on the steps of the church as he went into school.

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Kostrub said Munn would take him to the rectory, the house where clergy lived. He said priests were present and watching while Munn took him into a bedroom and shut the door. Once inside, Kostrub said Munn sexually assaulted him.

Kostrub said the abuse made him a "skittish, scared child" and had longer-reaching impacts.

Decades later, he still hasn't publicly described the abuse in anything more than general terms.



Todd Kostrub, now in his 50s, pictured at age 7 (Photo: Courtesy Jeff Anderson and Associates)

"For my entire life, I have lived with this terror, with this problem, with this horror of what occurred to me as a child at a very young age," he said during a press conference in New Jersey (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aqf-27om6vU>), the day after filing the lawsuit.

Statute of limitations had expired

Kostrub told his family about the abuse in 1996. His brother-in-law was a state trooper and asked him if he wanted to report Munn to police.

Kostrub enthusiastically agreed to talk to police.

After a year-long investigation, police produced a 27-page report and solicited a confession in which Munn admitted to abusing Kostrub and more than a dozen other young boys, Kostrub said.

He showed a State Journal reporter and editor a copy of the report, which includes a reference to three victims in Michigan.

According to a State Journal article published June 30, 1980, Munn lived in DeWitt where he was involved with the Franciscan order before being transferred to New Jersey in 1972 after a "conflict with one of the elder brothers over his extracurricular activities." He returned to DeWitt around 1979.

According to a 1984 directory (https://mandadb.hu/common/file-servlet/document/914151/default/doc_url/tabula_kapisztran_kusztodia_1984.pdf) for the order in which Munn was a brother, he served as a maintenance person for the Portiuncula in the Pines retreat house, which the Diocese of Lansing purchased in 1988 and renamed as the St. Francis Retreat Center (<http://www.stfrancis.ws/history.html>).



An old photo of former Franciscan brother Kurt Munn (Photo: Courtesy Jeff Anderson and Associates)

Police tried to charge Munn, but Kostrub was in his 30s, and the statute of limitations had expired.

A few years later, Munn bought property in Flushing and lived there briefly before settling back in DeWitt, public records show.

The Diocese of Lansing has "never received any allegations in relation to Kurt Munn's time as a Franciscan friar in DeWitt," diocese spokesman David Kerr said.

"We would certainly encourage anybody who believes themselves to be a victim to come forward to both the Diocese and law enforcement as soon as possible," Kerr said in an emailed statement.

Kostrub said he has spoken with Clinton County Sheriff Larry Jerue about Munn.

Jerue confirmed having had numerous and lengthy conversations with Kostrub beginning years ago, when he was DeWitt's police chief. He also recalled his predecessor as chief informing him about Munn and the New Jersey State Police investigation.

New Jersey law allows lawsuit

Meanwhile, even though Munn submitted a written statement to police, neither the Diocese of Trenton nor the Franciscan order have publicly acknowledged him as a sexual predator, Kostrub said.

"The concealment, the deceit, the aiding of this individual over the years, it's not just criminal. It's not just amoral," Kostrub said. "It's evil. It is truly evil."

That's meant Munn "could live a life of obscurity and I had no recourse," Kostrub said.

Kostrub said he's had nightmares about children being sexually assaulted because he isn't doing enough.

He said that changed when a new law went into effect Dec. 1.

The new law, which Kostrub pushed for 20 years, offers adult victims of childhood sexual abuse extended opportunities to sue by opening a temporary, two-year window to file lawsuits based on previously expired claims.

Kostrub's lawsuit

(<https://www.andersonadvocates.com/Documents/posts/Todd%20Kostrub%20v.%20Diocese%20of%20Trenton,%20Franciscan%20Friars,%20et%20al%202-19.pdf>) currently names the Diocese of Trenton, the parish where Kostrub says the abuse took place, a minor order of the Franciscan Friars and others



Todd Kostrub, left, pictured earlier this year at an awards dinner with a fellow advocate. (Photo: Courtesy of Todd Kostrub)

who Kostrub and his attorneys say aided Munn.

Greg Gianforcaro, Kostrub's attorney, said the complaint will be amended to add Munn as a direct defendant.

Kostrub, who filed his suit the day after the two-year window opened, said the new law has made an "enormous, enormous difference."

"It meant everything to me. Twenty years of waiting, 20 years of suffering, 20 years of thinking no one cares," Kostrub said. "It's given me a chance to have a voice."

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