

Reverend Joseph W. Jerge

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1927
YEAR OF DEATH:	2006
ORDINATION:	May 3, 1951

Employment/Assignment History

5/18/1951 – 6/30/1952	Parochial Vicar, St. Boniface, Erie, PA
6/30/1952 – 5/23/1959	Parochial Vicar, St. John the Baptist, Erie, PA
5/23/1959 – 8/29/1964	Parochial Vicars, St. Joseph, Oil City, PA
8/29/1964 – 6/03/1970	Pastor, St. Hippolyte, Guys Mills, PA
6/30/1970 – 12/04/1989	Pastor, St. Callistus, Kane, PA
4/19/1989 – 11/22/1989	Sick Leave
12/04/1989 – 6/14/1991	Parochial Vicar, St. John the Evangelist, Girard, PA
6/14/1991 – 9/01/1992	Parochial Vicar, St. Francis Xavier, McKean, PA
9/01/1992 – 2006	St. Patrick's Retirement Resident, Erie, PA

Summary

The Diocese of Erie was first made aware of sexual abuse allegations against Joseph W. Jerge in early 1989. On April 19, 1989, he was sent to St. Luke's Institute for sexual psychological therapy. In the fall of 1989, he was released from St. Luke's and signed an aftercare contract that restricted his contact and ministry with young boys. He was placed back into ministry at St. John the Evangelist.

On April 10, 1991, Jerge had a meeting with several members of the clergy, including Father Fischer. In this meeting, the support team voiced their concerns about Jerge's violations of his post-care contract, specifically about his continued contact with young boys. As a result, Bishop Trautman re-assigned Jerge to St. Francis Xavier parish in McKean on June 14, 1991. At that time Fischer, wrote several letters to the administration at St. Luke's voicing his concerns that Jerge was failing in his efforts to stay away from the youth of the Diocese. In his letters, Fischer reported that Jerge had admittedly offended upon numerous children and was nevertheless coaching youth basketball, hearing confessions, and ministering at a parish that had a swimming pool. Fischer went on to write that he felt that this swimming pool "*will only nourish the sickness.*"

In that same month, June 1991, Jerge again agreed to adhere to the conditions set forth in his original post-treatment conditions that restricted his contact with the young men of his parish. This clergy meeting took place in the presence of Father Glenn Whitman, Director of Clergy Personnel, and Father John Kirk.

Summary

Jerge's ministerial timeline places him at two parishes after the Diocese had officially confirmed the existence of several child victims of his sexual abuse and after he had been sent to St. Luke's for psychological counseling. It is unclear which victims came forward with allegations against Jerge, but one such victim is particularly well-documented by the Diocese. Victim #1 was a sophomore in high school when Jerge befriended him, took him on trips alone, and fondled him on a number of occasions. Later in Victim #1's life he would be blackballed from employment and preemptively blocked from any attempt to be admitted to seminary. In 1995, Victim #1 applied for a position as Director of Religious Education at one of the Diocesan schools. The Grand Jury found documentation in Diocese files that Bishop Trautman personally instructed school administrators not to hire Victim #1, noting in a letter to Father William Kuba that Victim #1 may be homosexual and may have attempted suicide. Also found in Victim #1's file was a notation that he was living an openly gay lifestyle and going to gay bars. This "*File Update*" marked Confidential is dated August 23, 1996. The same File Update which accuses Victim #1 of being homosexual concludes with this sentence: "*This file update is provided in the event that [Victim #1] would seek admission to the seminary studies here in this Diocese or elsewhere.*" This clear evidence that Victim #1 had been blackballed from employment or admission to seminary is contrary to the compassionate image the Church has historically sought to portray. It is also noted that the Diocese paid at least \$1,200 of Victim #1's counselling fees.

Jerge's abuse of Victim #2 was documented in detail by the Diocese. Victim #2 stated that his sexual abuse by Jerge began in approximately 1981 to 1985, when he was between the ages of thirteen and eighteen at St. Callistus. Victim #2 stated that all sexual assaults by Jerge occurred inside Jerge's car. He stated that Father Jerge would invite a small group of altar boys to go out with him after finishing their tasks at church. Victim #2 stated that he and three to five other boys would accompany Jerge to a movie or to a restaurant for a meal. Victim #2 said that he was always the last boy in the car to be taken home by Jerge. He stated that Jerge would drive around in his car with him for approximately twenty to thirty minutes. Victim #2 stated that Jerge would place his hand on Victim #2's crotch area and caress and rub it. Victim #2 explained that Jerge would put his fingers between Victim #2's button fly and stimulate that area. Victim #2 estimated that Jerge would molest him in the manner described above approximately two to four times a month when he was between the ages of thirteen and eighteen.

Victim #2 reported that he remembered an incident when he was in high school where Jerge's name came up. Victim #2 advised that he was at a party with similar-aged friends and a small group of youths were playing a game of truth or dare. Victim #2 stated that during the game a female classmate asked Victim #2 "*Truth or Dare? Has Father Jerge ever touched you?*" After this remark, Victim #2 wondered if others had also been sexually abused by Father Jerge.

Victim #2 eventually entered the priesthood and was ordained. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Summary

Victim #2 made his history of sexual abuse known to Bishop Donald Trautman in 2003. He obtained an attorney who sent a letter to Trautman notifying him of the allegations that had been made. A letter from Monsignor Robert J. Smith, Vicar General, on July 9, 2003 noted that there was a meeting between Trautman and Jerge. This letter stated that Trautman advised Jerge to consider securing both legal and canonical counsel. Trautman then advised Jerge that he intended to report Victim #2's allegations to the McKean County District Attorney. According to the letter, immediately following the meeting Trautman called the District Attorney for McKean County and gave her a full report of the allegations against Jerge. This letter also stated that Trautman called the District Attorney of Erie County to appraise him of the situation and to assure him of their compliance with the applicable standards and guidelines.

On August 10, 1992, while Jerge was the Parochial Vicar at St. Francis Xavier, a mother filed a complaint against Jerge. She accused Jerge of having an inappropriate friendship with her teenage son. The following day, several members of Trautman's administration met with Jerge. Monsignor Smith and Father Whitman concluded that the facts of the complaint, as they had been presented to the Diocese, were accurate and that Jerge did not deny them. As a result of this "grooming" behavior and in light of Jerge's history of child abuse, Trautman was forced to take Jerge out of ministry and place him in St. Patrick's Retirement Residence. Jerge spent the next fourteen years living in the Diocese's retirement facility, eventually dying in 2006.