

NAME: Fr. Joseph Bender  
DATE OF BIRTH: December 29, 1929  
DATE OF DEATH: August 7, 2000  
ORDINATION: May 25, 1957

ASSIGNMENTS:

05/1957-04/1958	St. Joseph's Church, Revono, PA
04/1958-06/1958	St. Columba's Church, Johnstown, PA
06/1958-08/1962	Cathedral of Blessed Sacrament, Altoona, PA
08/1962-11/1962	St. Andrew's Church, Johnstown, PA
11/1962-11/1968	St. Joseph's Church, Revono, PA
11/1968-06/1992	Immaculate Conception, Dudley, PA
06/1992	Retired "health difficulties" and "physical problems"

The Grand Jury has concluded that Father Joseph Bender was a serial child predator actively offending on children throughout the majority of his ministry within the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. Bender paid particularly close attention to a group of boys he favored. Other children referred to these boys as "Benderites". The age range of Bender's victims spanned from 8 to 13 years of age.

Many of Bender's victims report being encouraged by their parents to spend time with Bender in the hopes that they would choose the vocation of priest. Other parents took pride in the fact that a priest was taking an interest in the wellbeing of their child. To the children themselves, the adoration of the priest by their parents as well as the priest's divine authority left the children with the impression that the actions of the priest were inherently good and well-meaning.

Bender would take the boys on trips to include a cabin in Renovo, Pennsylvania. Bender was also active in camp activities through the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The boys were sexually abused almost constantly at any location at which Bender could have access to a child. One victim reported being kissed on the lips at the Cathedral and touched. Another victim reported that Bender ejaculated on the child after fondling the child's genitals and anus. Yet another victim reported being molested while in bed on a trip with Bender. Victims often reported Bender making their bodies have contact with his erect penis.

Bender would lash out in anger when the children rebuffed his advances. In a particular incident Bender grabbed a boy by the neck and asked "don't you love me anymore" when the child insisted on wearing underwear to bed. Bender took issue with the insistence on dignity as he directed the boys to sleep without underwear when they were on trips with him. Bender would also kiss the boys and chastise them if they did not give him a "proper" kiss. A proper kiss was on the lips according to Father Bender.

The victims all describe similar difficulties after the abuse: struggles to maintain their faith; drifting away from the church; inability to trust authorities; the challenge after being Bender's victim wasn't to attempt to live well, but to simply attempt to live. One victim, now over 50-years-old, stated that his life "became a living hell."

Father Joseph Bender was accused by an anonymous letter in 1991 for sex offenses against a child in the 1970's. The letter was addressed to Bishop Joseph Adamec. The letter stated in part:

*"All of us were altar boys, and spent a considerable amount of time at Father Bender's cottage located in Cypher, PA. We also went on vacations to the west coast for a month every summer, in which I attended two. I was his favorite young boy in our group. While on weekend visits, Father Bender would treat me as a lover. He would seduce me with various forms of hugging and kissing, with sexual overtones. Being a small child I was helpless to resist this man. As night time came, he would take me to his bedroom and engage in numerous forms of sexual acts. These pedophilic acts included fondling, foreplay, masturbation, and oral sex. He would continue with the sexual encounter until he reached an orgasm. Immediately following the sexual act, he would speak of guilt and admission of what he had done was wrong, and that I would never tell anyone, especially my parents. He is a very calculative and manipulative man with young boys. Because I respected his position, and feared the consequences of disobeying him, I would remain silent. I would estimate that I was abused approximately one hundred times."*

The letter went on to note that it was being written upon the realization that Bender was continuing to have contact with young boys. The writer requested that Adamec stop Bender from hurting anymore children and noted his own struggle with his deep emotional scars. Adamec permitted Bender to resign his ministerial duties in 1992. The public reason that was given was ongoing health issues or physical problems. However Adamec had kept notes from Bender's October 1991 evaluation which showed the threat

*level of sensitivity. This occurred from 1967-1968 while at a parish in Renovo, Pa. "I regretted it, however there was that very strong attraction." Essentially, the first lad involved was a 12-year-old boy dating back to 1967-1968. It is related that manual sexual activities of a manipulatory nature was the only type of activity involved in that first relationship.*

*Father Bender then assumed his position as a Pastor at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Dudley, Pa. At that parish, two additional male minors became involved. The patient had also come to fully realize his sexual orientation. With this awareness he found an adult intimate male friend who resided at a considerable distance away from the parish. Father Bender now realizes in retrospect that these sexual encounters are somewhat of an evolutionary process of his sexuality and identity*

*For approximately the past 10 years, there has been no involvement of any type regarding sexuality as Father Bender conveyed he has been impotent. As perhaps a note of irony, he became impotent during the adult homosexual encounter. He commented, "for at least 10 years I've tried to keep at arms length from any boys so I wouldn't be accused of anything. - I realize how guilty I felt and know how they must have felt." He continued, "At times, I considered killing myself."*

*...Father Bender did demonstrate, what I feel is, a genuine remorse regarding this entire situation, with the total of three minors involved."*

Father Bender had been in active ministry continually for 35 years, yet Bishop Joseph Adamec never contacted the police upon learning of the allegations or Bender's damning admission to sexually abusing children. The Grand Jury finds that there were more than "a total of three minors" who were sexually abused by Father Bender. That error appears to be just one of the many made in Bender's so-called "evaluation" or so our collective common sense leads us to believe. An inconvenient common sense Bishop Adamec conveniently ignored. Father Joseph Bender died retired but still a priest in 2000. His victims attempt to live on.