

NAME: Fr. Dennis Coleman  
DATE OF BIRTH: April 17, 1944  
DATE OF DEATH: March 12, 2014  
ORDINATION: May 16, 1970

ASSIGNMENTS:

06/1970-08/1972	St. Patrick's Church, Gallitzin, PA
08/1972-05/1975	St. Mark's Church, Altoona, PA
05/1975-08/1979	St. John's Church, Bellefonte, PA
08/1979-05/1982	Sacred Heart, Johnstown, PA
05/1982-01/1986	St. Benedict Church, Johnstown, PA
*01/1986	Saint Luke's Institute for evaluation
02/1986-08/1986	"Fr. Coleman suffering nervous problem"
09/1986-07/1987	Sisters of Sacred Heart, Cresson, PA
07/1987	Suspended

On August 23, 1979 the parents of a 10-year-old little boy met with Bishop James Hogan. The parents explained that they had noticed a change in their child over the past 6 to 8 months. His parents said he seemed tense and anxious. The parents recounted that their son had told a teacher at St. John's school that he "thought Father Coleman was gay." Coleman was a priest at St. John's Church in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. Hogan noted in the "Secret Archives" of the Church that "The parents, on the other hand, were upset in going over (REDACTED) story. Distressed over emotional repercussions, involvement with others, possible scandal, Father's future. Persuaded of illness."

Bishop Hogan met with the 10-year-old himself. The boy recounted that Father Coleman practiced "hypnosis" and would invite little boys to spend the night at the rectory. Coleman would sneak into the room and sniff their feet. Hogan noted that Coleman would also rub his "membrum virile" on the boy's feet. The Grand Jury notes that Hogan's use of Latin did not change the fact that Coleman, a diocesan priest, was rubbing his penis on the feet of little boys. On other occasions Coleman asked to take pictures of the child in his underwear.

After initially wondering whether or not the victim was confused about the definition of the word "gay", Hogan concluded the victim was "quite normal, and likable - given to sports." Hogan records indicate that a discussion was had with the parents and their reference to it possibly being a "criminal offense" but that he felt the parents

recognized the “weak human element.” Hogan’s memo to the “Secret Archive” concludes:

*I informed the parents I would immediately check the story for Fr's (Coleman) reaction. My own reaction will depend. If help is indicated, my job is to .... Assured that they did the right thing in coming, and that the matter will be dealt with appropriately. Mr. & Mrs. seemed much relieved – and said so. Expressed gratitude for my listening, assurances, etc. James J. Hogan, August 23, 1979*

In a follow-up memo the next day, Hogan recounts an interview with Coleman where Hogan and Coleman question the mental competency of the victim. Wondering if it was a “dream” or a “bizarre imagination” the Bishop gave Father Coleman four steps to complete:

1. *Keep kids out of the rectory.*
2. *No more trifling with hypnotism.*
3. *Discuss with parents my intervention and his story. If not satisfactory, bring (victim) into discussion. Does boy need help?*
4. *Get back to me re result of discussion. Fr. C (Coleman) is aware of fact that if things go badly a transfer may be necessary.*

Coleman returned to ministry at St. John’s much to the horror of the victims’ parents. In the face of outcry and risking “scandal” Hogan transferred Father Coleman to Sacred Heart in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Within a year of being reassigned to Sacred Heart Father Dennis Coleman invited a 12 to 13-year-old student of the Sacred Heart School into the rectory to “hypnotize” him. Coleman took the boys feet and used them to rub his exposed genitals. Coleman continued to meet with the boy 2 to 3 times a month for these sessions for a period of two years until the child finished the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

In 1982 Coleman was moved to St. Benedict Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. While there Coleman molested at least three 13-year-old boys. Father Coleman would take boys camping and attempt to “hypnotize” them. Coleman would enter the boys’ room at night and take the boys’ feet and rub them on his exposed genitals. At least one of the children became extremely distraught during an assault and demanded to return home. Coleman kept the boy for hours until finally relenting and taking the boy home at 4:00 A.M. The child immediately disclosed the abuse to his parents. That child suffered

extreme emotional distress and spent many years suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In 1986 Bishop Hogan was forced to face the reality that he could no longer hide Coleman's conduct. Coleman was unresponsive to Hogan's usual attempts to keep things quiet and avoid "scandal." Coleman began to resist additional transfers and objected to "treatment." Hogan found himself faced with a rare challenge, a priest that wouldn't help him keep his terrible secret.

The Grand Jury found that Hogan's 1979 memo from the "Secret Archive" was altered on May 1, 1986, by Bishop Hogan. Hogan added the following:

*"In retrospect, though I accepted Fr. C's story and did actually transfer him to Sacred Heart Parish, Altoona on September 1, 1979, (incidentally, as correspondence indicates the social worker in Johnstown accepted Fr's story as well). No further adverse information to my knowledge while at Sacred Heart. Since Fr. C preferred Johnstown and a need arose, he was transferred to St. Benedict's, Johnstown on May 22, 1982. In retrospect (forgive lapse in L.I), I should have directed professional evaluation and treatment indicated back in 1979. Later developments, in my opinion, cast suspicion on Fr. C's 1979 story. But, at that time, he seemed truthful. Nor was there the current climate. The present furor was action upon immediately with removal and institutional direction. J.J. Hogan"*

At the time of this addendum, Hogan was engaged in a successful attempt to broker an agreement with Altoona Police to defuse the potential scandal of Father Leonard Inman's (referenced as L.I.) sexual child abuse of children. The Grand Jury has no doubt that Hogan's return to the archive was a poor attempt at revisionist history in the midst of being faced with the possibility of another explosive exposure of a priest raping children in the most magnificent Cathedral of the Diocese, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona, Pennsylvania. If Hogan believed this footnote would permit posterity to judge him more gently, he erred.

As the reigns of authority were passed from Bishop Hogan to Bishop Joseph Adamec a new arrangement was hatched. Coleman had been sent to the Sisters of Sacred Heart convent in Cresson, Pennsylvania as Chaplain. His refusal to comply with "treatment", in the face of damning evidence against him, was causing fractures in the usual process of self-reporting "treatment" followed by a designation which would protect the institution from scandal and permit the priest to continue in ministry. Adamec

was struggling to deal with the possibility of Coleman's conduct being exposed or continuing. On July 30, 1987, Adamec wrote Coleman stating:

*"While the Diocese is in the process of trying to deal with the situation outside of civil court, you have been observed to continue associating with young men both in private and in public. This makes it appear that I, as Bishop, am not concerning over the harm that you have caused or can continue to cause. It also appears that you are insensitive to the hurts which you inflict on others as a result of your own needs and inclinations."*

Adamac concluded that letter by suspending Coleman. However, Adamec made an attempt to insert Coleman into the public sphere of employment with the aid of the Cambria County President Judge. Coleman was granted the opportunity to work at the Cambria County Courthouse. Coleman himself ruined the gift Adamec had secured for him by boasting of his newfound status and bringing attention to his assignment. Joseph Kiniry wrote the Bishop on September 29, 1987 and explained that the reactions were becoming so strong that "devout Catholics" were now objecting and that it would be "a disaster for the Church, for the clergy in general, and for the Catholic population of the Courthouse and for the Ebensburg area in particular." Kiniry summarized:

*"Unfortunately, 'the best of plans of mice and men, etc' – I am writing to inform you that following our conversation on Sunday evening about the possibility of a position for Father Coleman at the Cambria County Courthouse, and my relating your expression of gratitude to Judge Joseph O'Kicki for his assistance, the bottom fell out Monday."*

By July 1988, Coleman's continued refusal to submit to treatment forced the Bishop's hand. Coleman, more by his own actions than the Bishop's intent, was finally suspended and never returned to ministry. Neither Hogan or Adamec ever reported Coleman's conduct to law enforcement. He died in 2014.