

NAME: Fr. John Palko
DATE OF BIRTH: August 4, 1941
DATE OF DEATH: May 31, 2005
ORDINATION: May 20, 1967

ASSIGNMENTS:

06/1967-09/1973 Holy Name Church, Ebensburg, PA
09/1973-11/1980 St. Anthony's Church, South Fork, PA
11/1980-06/1988 St. Mary's Church, Gallitzin, PA
06/1988-06/1993 St. John Cantius and St. Mary's Church, Windber, PA
06/1993-05/2005 St. Mary's Immaculate Conception, Altoona, PA

The handling of the Father John Palko allegation is an example of the fraud that is the Allegation Review Board. On May 3, 2002, Monsignor George Flinn took a call from an alleged victim of sexual assault. On May 10, 2002, after a series of failed attempts to make contact, Bishop Joseph Adamec and the victim spoke by telephone. The victim reported that while she was 16-years-old and a student at Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School she had been "taken advantage of" by Father Palko.

Palko began grooming the victim when he took her on a trip to Boston. During the drive she shared things with Father Palko and began to trust him. At some point she went to speak with him at St. Mary's Church in Gallitzin, Pennsylvania. The victim was kissed, fondled and Palko penetrated her with his penis. These encounters occurred at least 3 times. The victim reported at the time she felt it was consensual but in hindsight realizes she was only a 16-year-old girl and he was an adult.

The Diocese never removed Palko from ministry. Instead, the Diocese engaged in an active investigation of the victim. Diocese records demonstrate a clear bias and effort to intimidate the victim through process and "confrontation." Bishop Joseph Adamec asked the victim if she would be willing to "meet with Father Palko face-to-face in order to confront him." Internal Diocesan records attempt to note inconsistency by the date that the victim was a junior at Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High in contrast to the date that Palko started at St. Mary's Church. No notes indicate any investigation of Father Palko's history or conduct.

While Bishop Adamec was portraying a concerned Bishop who was invested in the victim's best interests by phone, Adamec made sure to report any and all information he gained from the victim to an attorney. While Adamec listened to the victim's prayer,

Adamec made sure that Father Palko had legal representation. While the victim asked Adamec to intervene on her behalf because her parents were upset she “brought the incident up”, Adamec sought to insulate the Diocese and sent Palko to have an “evaluation” based upon Palko’s self-report. The Grand Jury finds, as noted throughout this report, the Diocese shrinks behind these self-reported evaluations as justification for poor judgement and reckless conduct. The evaluation is useless, as noted by the Bishop “there is nothing in the data that would shed light on the allegations.” The Grand Jury notes such data is entirely based upon Palko’s “denial.”

In the end nothing came of the victim’s allegation. The Diocese’s Allegation Review Board Policy allows it to obtain multiple statements from a victim. Multiple oral statements to various persons within the Diocese, then further Diocesan requests for a “written” statement from the victim are not uncommon. The Grand Jury finds in the Allegation Review Board the Diocese holds all the rights, and the victim holds only the right to be harassed and questioned.

In this case Adamec’s insistence on an additional victim statement to be provided “in writing” resulted in no action being taken. The victim hadn’t conformed to Adamec’s made-up process for justice as he saw it. Father Palko continued in ministry until his death in 2005. Adamec and the Allegation Review Board never called the police. As in so many other instances, the truth fell back into silence.