

Reverend Robert G. Cofenas

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1941
YEAR OF DEATH:	N/A
ORDINATION:	January 6, 1973

Employment/Assignment History

1/1973 – 6/1979	Newman Center, Bethlehem, PA
6/1973 – 6/1975	Assistant Superintendent, Secondary Education, Diocese of Allentown, PA
6/1975 – 2/1979	Catholic Students Advisor, Newman Apostolate, Lehigh University, PA
6/1975 – 2/1979	Catholic Students Advisor, Newman Apostolate, Moravian College, PA
6/1975 – 2/1979	Guidance Counsellor, Norte Dame High School, Easton, PA
6/1975 – 2/1979	Director, Newman Apostolate, Diocese of Allentown
2/1979 – 7/1980	Assistant Superintendent of Education, Diocese of Allentown
2/1979 – 7/1980	St.s Simon and Jude, Bethlehem, PA
7/1980 – 5/1981	St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, Maryland
5/1981 – 6/1988	St. Ignatius Loyola, Sinking Spring, PA
9/1981	Regional Director, American Catholic Overseas Aid Fund
11/1983 – 11/1986	Council of Priests, Diocese of Allentown
6/1988 – 9/1988	St. Ignatius Loyola, Sinking Spring, PA
6/1988 – 10/1989	Diocesan Newspaper
9/1988 – 10/1989	Our Lady of Help of Christians, Allentown, PA
10/1989 – 8/1990	Sabbatical (The Servants of the Paraclete, Jemez Springs, New Mexico)
8/1990 – 6/1997	Our Lady of Help of Christians, Allentown, PA
2/24/1992	Special Advocate, Diocesan Tribunal
6/1997 – 10/2000	St. Catharine of Siena, Reading, PA
2/2000 – 3/2000	Sabbatical (St. John Vianney Treatment Facility, Downingtown)
4/11/2000	Decree of Suspension
2/11/2005	Dismissed from Priesthood

Summary

Records received from the Diocese of Allentown indicate the church was aware of Father Robert G. Cofenas' sexual attraction to young males as early as 1979. In a handwritten letter to Bishop Joseph Mark McShea, a secretary at The Newman Center of Lehigh University reported that she observed concerning behavior on the part of Cofenas. The secretary reported witnessing Cofenas befriend a "young boy (about 16 years of age)." The boy's name was known to the

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secretary. According to the letter, the boy had a serious drug problem and arrived at the Newman Center “*half-starved and in pretty bad shape.*”

The boy was hospitalized and upon discharge continued to visit the Newman Center. The secretary observed that, as soon as the boy arrived at the center, Cofenas would take him to his upstairs room and would lock the door. Cofenas told the secretary that the boy spent the night at the Center. According to the secretary, Cofenas showed a “great deal of inappropriate affection toward the boy.” The secretary recommended that Cofenas be transferred “before something disastrous occurs.” She added that she believed that Cofenas knew of her suspicions and felt that it was a cry for help on Cofenas’ part when he told her of the boy staying the night at the Newman Center. Cofenas was reassigned approximately six months after the letter was written to the Bishop.

While assigned to St. Mary’s College in Emmitsburg, Maryland, Cofenas wrote a letter to Bishop McShea dated April 6, 1981. Cofenas wrote: “Yes, I have failed again, but my problem is not so totally out of hand that I cannot with God’s help and Dr. Zanni, work to master my situation. Incidentally, prior to now, I had experienced no failure in this matter since 1978.” Cofenas went on to write: “I am deeply sorry for letting you down again. You can imagine how hard it is for me to write this letter—especially when you trusted me and released me to the Mount.” Before ending the letter, Cofenas wrote, “I know you want to protect me and I appreciate your concern for me, but I ask you to consider the possibility of my staying at the Mount.” Approximately one month later, Cofenas was transferred to St. Ignatius of Loyola, Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania.

A Confidential Memorandum written by Monsignor John B. McCann and dated February 3, 2000, indicates that a known victim and the victim’s father met with McCann and Monsignor Alfred A. Schlert to report sexual abuse at the hands of Cofenas. The victim reported that, in 1986 at the age of seventeen, he was abused by Cofenas. At the time of the abuse, Cofenas was assigned to St. Ignatius of Loyola Church in Sinking Spring and served as the moderator of the Youth Group. As a high school graduation gift, Cofenas proposed taking the victim to the shore. Initially, the father of the victim was reluctant to allow this to occur but permitted it because of the trust he placed in Cofenas as a priest. The victim went on to describe in detail the events of the three-day trip with Cofenas. The victim and Cofenas held hands for the duration of the car ride to the shore. Once at the hotel, Cofenas provided alcohol to the victim, masturbated the victim, and coerced him to engage in oral sex. Cofenas and the victim showered together and slept in the same bed. According to the victim, sexual encounters with Cofenas continued until 1992, when Cofenas began blaming the victim for what had occurred. The victim’s father reported that Cofenas made a sexual advance to his other son, which was rebuffed.

In a January 12, 2004, report to the Vatican, and addressed to “Your Eminence,” Bishop Edward P. Cullen admitted that the Diocese knew about Cofenas’ inappropriate relationship with a sixteen-year-old boy in 1979. Cullen added that, on February 17, 2000, Cofenas admitted to the abuse of the victim in 1986. After his admission, Cofenas was sent to St. John Vianney Treatment Facility in Downingtown for therapy. Cullen wrote that the abused victim and his

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family were demanding that Cofenas be laicized and “*threatening to go to the public media if he is not.*” Cullen also wrote, “*Currently there is great danger that this case could become public.*” The report recommended that Cofenas be laicized. Cofenas was receiving a monthly stipend and healthcare benefits from the Diocese. Cullen’s final recommendation was that an “*Administrative Penal Process be applied in this case.*”