

Reverend James Gaffney

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1957
YEAR OF DEATH:	N/A
ORDINATION:	June 8, 1985

Employment/Assignment History

5/1985 – 6/1987	St. Ursula, Fountain Hill, PA
6/1987 – 6/1991	Reading Central Catholic High School
6/1987 – 1/1992	St. Catherine of Siena, Mt. Penn, PA
1/1992 – 6/1992	Sick Leave (The Servants of the Paraclete, New Mexico)
6/1992 – 1/1995	St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Easton, PA
4/1994 – 1/1995	Sick Leave (The Servants of the Paraclete)
1/1995 – 2/1995	Notre Dame of Bethlehem, Bethlehem, PA
2/1995 – 6/1995	St. Mary of the Assumption, Coaldale, PA
6/1995 – 6/1999	Assisted with six parishes in Shenandoah
6/1999 – 4/2002	St. Patrick, Pottsville
4/2002	Abandoned ministry
6/26/2015	Dismissed from Priesthood

Summary

Father James Gaffney began work as a Diocesan priest in 1985. However, records received from the Diocese of Allentown indicate that, in 1980, years before being ordained as a priest, Gaffney questioned his vocation and wrote in a letter to Monsignor Muntone that he was “*convinced beyond all doubt that I need time off and will not return to the Roman Seminary or any other seminary this year.*” In 1982, it was recommended that Gaffney be dropped from “our program of formation.” Monsignors Thompson and Muntone and Chancery personnel met and the decision was made not to dismiss. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Gaffney was reported to have been involved in inappropriate and even sexual relations with adult women, one of which had a learning disability and whom he was counseling. Gaffney was placed on sick leave on two different occasions.

In 1999, a known victim reported to Monsignor John B. McCann that she had been sexually abused by Gaffney while he was assigned as Assistant Pastor at St. Ursula’s Church. Other than a one-paragraph memorandum reporting the abuse, no more information was provided to the Diocese until the mother of the victim renewed the allegation of abuse on April 24, 2002. The victim met with Chancery personnel and informed them that, when she was fourteen years old and in eighth grade, Gaffney befriended her. The victim worked at the rectory answering phones. Gaffney had her undress and “*measured her body parts.*” Gaffney had sexual contact with her that continued throughout the time Gaffney was at the parish. Monsignors McCann and Schlert confronted Gaffney with the report of abuse. Gaffney denied the

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allegations. McCann and Schlert told Gaffney to carefully think about the allegations and to consider taking a leave of absence if there was any truth to them. As he was on his way home after the meeting, Gaffney called to tell McCann and Schlert that he was taking a leave of absence.

On September 27, 2004, a second victim filed a civil complaint in the Court of Common Pleas of Berks County. The second victim reported that the abuse began in 1990 when she was sixteen and a student at Reading Central Catholic High School, where Gaffney was Vice Principal and Disciplinarian. Gaffney provided her counseling, which led to the sexual abuse. The second victim reported that her parents were going through a divorce and she was experiencing depression. Gaffney took advantage of her depressed state. The second victim reported that Gaffney routinely took her for car rides and would discuss topics such as intercourse, oral sex, and masturbation. During the rides Gaffney started to require her to place her hands on his penis. On one occasion, Gaffney exposed his erect penis to the second victim in his office at the high school. The second victim reported that eventually Gaffney took her to a private residence where he required her to submit to intercourse with him. Gaffney also repeatedly required the second victim to submit to him performing numerous sex acts on her and required her to perform sex acts on him.

On December 2, 2004, a third known victim reported abuse at the hands of Gaffney in 1986-1987, when Gaffney was assigned to St. Catharine of Siena in Mount Penn, Berks County. The third victim worked in the rectory answering phones in the evening. She had a very poor home life and Gaffney counseled her. The third victim reported that Gaffney would hug her and inappropriately touch and kiss her, which led to sexual arousal. The Diocese referred the third victim to counseling and spiritual direction.

A report by Monsignors Gobitas and James to Bishop Barres, dated July 18, 2011, indicates that the reports of abuse by the first and third victims were credible, while the report of abuse by the second victim was “*entitled to a presumption of truth.*” Also, Gobitas and James found that all three reports of abuse “*point to a consistent pattern of behavior on the part of Father Gaffney.*” Although Gaffney took a leave of absence in 2002, he continued to receive health and other insurance for the next nine years from the Diocese, even though he abandoned all ministry. Gobitas and James recommended that Gaffney be dismissed from the clerical state and that he never be able to exercise public ministry for the remainder of his life. Based on reports from both “*qualified and professional personnel,*” it was the belief of Gobitas and James that Gaffney remained a potential danger to minors. However, Gaffney went on to obtain employment as a college professor at Albright College. The Diocese never warned the College of Gaffney’s history of sexually abusing children.

Gaffney was called as a witness before the Grand Jury on September 14, 2016 and again on May 8, 2017. Gaffney stated that no member of law enforcement had ever contacted him regarding his conduct until he received a subpoena ordering him to appear before the Grand Jury. Gaffney admitted to sexual contact with at least one female student. The attorney for the Commonwealth reminded Gaffney that he was under oath. Gaffney was then asked if he had sexual contact with other children as a priest and he answered, “*Yes. It is possible.*” Gaffney

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blamed a faulty memory for a lack of specifics. However, Gaffney detailed sexual contact with a minor in a car, on school property, and at other locations.

Gaffey admitted he also disclosed that, while interning at St. Joseph's in Summit Hill in 1980, he located child pornography within the parish. The image depicted Father David Soderlund masturbating a 12-year-old boy. Gaffney reported his finding to the Diocese and Monsignor Muntone. Gaffney and Muntone located albums of photographs depicting Soderlund sexually abusing children. A meeting was held with the District Attorney of Carbon County, who promised not to prosecute Soderlund if he was transferred and received treatment. After a brief removal from ministry on health leave, Soderlund was returned to ministry. The volumes of evidence of sexually abused children that were manufactured by Soderlund as he committed the crimes, after being found by Gaffney and Muntone, were never seen again.