

## The Case of Father Michael S. Lawrence

### Known Assignments

06/1973 - 06/1974	St. Catharine of Siena, Reading
06/1974 - 11/1974	Notre Dame High School, Easton Sacred Heart, Miller Heights
11/1974 - 12/1974	Coordinator of Adult Religious Education, North Hampton
12/1974 - 06/1975	St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Easton
06/1975 - 12/1975	St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Easton
12/1975 - 06/1977	St. Anne, Bethlehem
06/1977 - 06/1978	Central Catholic High School, Allentown St. Lawrence, Catasauqua
06/1978 - 08/1978	Diocesan Tribunal
08/1978 - 03/1980	Holy Trinity, Whitehall
03/1980 - 11/1982	St. Catharine of Siena, Reading
11/1982 - 03/1984	St. Anthony, Easton
03/1984 - 06/1984	Notre Dame High School, Easton St. Anthony, Easton
06/1984 - 08/1984	St. Joseph, Easton Notre Dame High School, Easton
08/1984 - 01/1987	Immaculate Conception, Jim Thorpe
01/1987 - 06/1987	Sick Leave
06/1987 - 03/1994	St. Paul, Allentown Diocesan Tribunal Ministry to the Aging
03/1994 - 06/1998	Diocesan Tribunal
06/1998 - 01/2000	Catholic University of America Divine Word College
01/2000 - 03/2002	Courage
03/2002 - 04/2015	Retired

Father Michael Lawrence was ordained on May 19, 1973. Suspicions of Lawrence's pedophilic behavior were brought to the attention of the Church as early as 1970 while Lawrence was attending St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. A student evaluation found within the records of the Diocese and obtained by the Grand Jury indicate that Lawrence was "a mysterious type who craves the attention of younger students" and that Lawrence showed "a little too much interest in younger students." Regardless of these observations, in 1981, Bishop Joseph McShea wished Lawrence well and noted that Lawrence "and a group of young people from Saint Catherine's

Parish will be making a retreat on the weekend of November 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>." The Bishop's salutations are contained within his November 5, 1981, letter to Lawrence on the subject.



BISHOP'S OFFICE  
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202 NORTH SEVENTEENTH STREET  
(215) 437-0755

November 5, 1981

The Reverend Michael S. Lawrence, M. Div.  
Saint Catharine of Siena Parish Center  
2427 Perkiomen Avenue  
Mount Penn  
Reading, Pennsylvania 19606

Dear Father Lawrence,

It was recently brought to my attention that you and a group of young people from Saint Catharine's Parish will be making a retreat on the weekend of November 20th-22nd.

I would like you and all those who will be on retreat with you to know that you will be very much in my thoughts and prayers during the weekend.

I pray that the weekend will be a time of special graces which will draw all of you closer to our Lord and His Church.

I ask that you remember my intentions during the weekend, and that you pray in a special way for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life.

With every blessing and good wish, I remain

Cordially yours,

Bishop of Allentown

The Bishop's Letter

Less than a year later, a 12-year-old boy told his father that Lawrence had sexually abused him. A report written by Monsignor Anthony Muntone, dated August 18, 1982, indicated that Father Fred Loeper called the Chancery to report an “unfortunate incident.” Lawrence, then a priest at St. Catharine’s of Siena, Reading, had sexually abused a 12-year-old boy. The father of the victim called Loeper to report the details of the incident. The victim told his father that he had been in Lawrence’s room for a tutoring session. At the end of the session, the talk between Lawrence and the victim turned to sex. Lawrence then began to touch his genitals, had the victim take down his pants, and began to fondle the victim’s genitals. The victim’s father reported that his son had told him there had been “a lot of fondling, so much that he felt pain.” Additionally, Lawrence made the victim urinate. The victim’s father also reported the victim was having a hard time sleeping.

Muntone called Lawrence into his office and asked what had happened between Lawrence and the reporting victim. Lawrence responded “Please help me. I sexually molested a young boy.” Lawrence then admitted he had the victim come to his room for an English lesson. Lawrence had the victim remove his pants and underwear and Lawrence touched the boy’s genitals. He then drove the victim home.

Records indicate that Lawrence was sent to “Downingtown” (St. John Vianney Center) the same day he confessed to Muntone. Muntone wrote in his report that he spoke to “the doctor” at Downingtown, who informed him that the family of the victim should be given time to “ventilate” and what the victim experienced may not “be a horrendous trauma for the boy.”

August 18, 1982

Father Fred Loeper called the Chancery to report an unfortunate incident involving Father Michael Lawrence, assistant pastor at St. Catherine's, Mount Penn.

Father Lawrence had a twelve year old boy, [redacted] in his room last evening for a tutoring session. At the end of the session, the talk turned to sex. Father Lawrence demonstrated certain things on himself. He then had [redacted] drop his pants and he demonstrated on the boy. [redacted] upon returning home was very confused and upset. He told his father what had happened.

Father Loeper then reported that Mr. [redacted] had attempted to call him but Father Lawrence took the call and said Father Loeper would not be available until the next day.

The next day, Father Lawrence had a day off. Mr. [redacted] called Father Loeper. In relating this incident, Father Loeper also said that Father Lawrence always associates with families who have boys and that he is always making physical contact with the altar boys.

Father Loeper concluded by saying that

Mr. [redacted] and [redacted] two older brothers were waiting to see what action the Diocese would take. If something isn't done, they will take legal action.

I then called Father Lawrence to the office. I simply asked him what had happened between [redacted] and himself the night before. He responded, "Please help me. I sexually molested a young boy."

I asked him to tell me exactly what had happened. He said [redacted] had come to his room for an English lesson. At a certain point, he asked [redacted] to remove his pants and underwear. The boy did. He reported that he touched [redacted] twice on the genitals. He then drove him home.

He insists that he did not expose himself and that nothing more than that took place.

I informed him he was to be at Downingtown between three and four that afternoon and that he was not to leave the campus until he heard from me.

When I called Downingtown, the doctor informed me that it would be most

important to give the family an opportunity to ventilate. She said they should be assured that the matter is being taken very seriously. She also said that the experience will not necessarily be a horrendous trauma for the boy, but he should be given the opportunity to talk it out with Father Loeper.

The following day, Father Loeper called to report that [redacted] told his father there had been a lot of fondling, so much so that he felt pain. [redacted] also said that Father Lawrence had him urinate.

Mr. [redacted] was described as much more upset. [redacted] was having a hard time sleeping. There was more talk of legal action.

A. J. M.

Less than two years later, Lawrence was assigned to a high school to teach religion classes. A handwritten note to Bishop Thomas Welsh, dated April 9, 1984, reported that things were “going well” since Lawrence had taken over Bill Baker’s religion classes. The note went on to state that Lawrence would like to be “reassigned to the school with the spring appointments.” The note is signed Tony, for Anthony Muntone.

Tony  
see  
+ Tgw

any idea of using Bill Baker  
e.g. Trenton

April 9, 1984

Bishop,

Mike Lawrence called today and said that things have been going so well since he took over Bill Baker's religion classes at Notre Dame High School that he would like to be reassigned to the school with the Spring appointments.

He also reported that Bill Baker is like a new man since being relieved of the teaching assignment. He said Bill is doing very well as a curate and seems very happy.

I will check with Bob Fort to find out how things are going from his point of view.

Tony



Lawrence continued in ministry as a Roman Catholic priest in the Diocese of Allentown in different parishes, schools, and other assignments. However, he was removed from parish ministry in 1987 and placed on “sick leave.” A letter from Welsh to Lawrence dated October 20, 1987, stated:

On the advice of legal counsel, I write to inform you that effective immediately your faculties to celebrate Mass and otherwise function as a priest of the Diocese of Allentown are limited to the confines of the Convent at Bethlehem Catholic High School. I would ask you to make an appointment to see Monsignor Muntone at the chancery at your earliest opportunity.

The Grand Jury learned that the father of the boy who reported his abuse in 1982 had continued to complain to the Diocese regarding Lawrence’s continued role in active ministry. The Diocese found itself, albeit temporarily, unable to maintain the secret of Lawrence’s conduct. On the advice of legal counsel, they removed Lawrence from ministry.

Lawrence met with Welsh on November 5, 1987. The following day, Lawrence memorialized his thoughts in a letter. Lawrence admitted that the possibility of legal action and his removal from ministry had caused him anxiety. He wrote, “I find myself in a very dangerous position. The deep sense of frustration and anger have led me to act-out sexually in the past and if my present situation continues it becomes a possibility again.” Lawrence referenced another known predatory priest, Joseph Rock, and opined that perhaps they could be a source of support for one another. Lawrence requested a compromise in which he could celebrate the liturgy at the Manor. Ultimately, Lawrence continued to serve as an active priest on the Diocesan Tribunal without a documented parish assignment.

But for the perseverance of the victim’s father, the Diocese would have returned Lawrence to active parish ministry as they had done time and time again, as documented within Diocesan records reviewed by the Grand Jury. Although hiding Lawrence in ministry within the Diocesan

Tribunal was a poor substitute for actual removal from all ministries and titles, the efforts of this concerned parent kept Lawrence out of parish ministry.

The frustration this devoted father caused the Diocese of Allentown was documented in a confidential memorandum written by Muntone to Bishop Edward Cullen on May 5, 1998. Father Alfred Schlert was carbon copied. Muntone wrote:

Something of a sticky situation has arisen with regard to Mike Lawrence who serves as secretary at the Tribunal. Back in 1987, it has come to light that Mike had been involved in some very indecent behavior with a young boy about ten or twelve years old, some five years earlier when he had been serving at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Reading. The father of the boy was about as angry as I have ever seen anyone, and I have the feeling that he was just short of resorting to physical violence. He was almost irrational and it was very difficult to deal with him.

Muntone noted that once or twice the father of the boy came into the Diocesan offices and vented his anger. Muntone added, "It was pretty terrible." Muntone stated that Welsh renewed Lawrence's faculties on the Tribunal and that a new appointment for Lawrence was announced in the Diocesan newspaper. Muntone described the father of the victim as going "ballistic" and reported that he came to the Chancery once again, where he "complained bitterly that someone as evil as Mike was now being honored by the Church." Muntone noted that the Diocese created a list of priests whose ministry assignments should not be made public without consultation with Diocesan administrators as a result of this incident. Muntone concluded his memo by highlighting "the problem" of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Lawrence's ordination being at hand. Muntone asked for advice as to how to handle the normal process whereby Diocesan publications highlighted priest jubilarians of the Diocese under the circumstances. Muntone noted that, if the regular fanfare was provided for Lawrence's anniversary, it could be problematic and result in the victim's father "banging on the door once again." Regardless, Lawrence continued in his priestly duties on the Diocesan Tribunal until 2002.

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## MEMORANDUM

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DATE: May 5, 1998  
TO: Bishop Cullen  
FROM: Msgr. Muntone *C. M.*  
RE: Fr. Michael Lawrence  
CC: Fr. Schlerf ✓

Something of a "sticky" situation has arisen with regard to Mike Lawrence who serves as secretary at the Tribunal.

Back in 1987, it had come to light that Mike had been involved in some very indecent behavior with a young boy about ten or twelve years old, some five years earlier, when he had been serving at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Reading. The father of the boy was about as angry as I have ever seen anyone, and I have the feeling that he was just short of resorting to physical violence. He was almost irrational and it was very difficult to deal with him.

Michael was sent to Downingtown, where he remained for about six months. After his discharge he was appointed secretary to the Tribunal, and he has remained there ever since. Once or twice since then, the father of the boy came in to the Office and vented his anger. It was pretty terrible.

A few years ago, Bishop Welsh applied to Rome for the renewal of the faculties of those who serve at the Tribunal without the necessary canonical degrees. Among them was Michael. When the faculties were renewed, the Bishop reappointed the tribunal staff. There was an arrangement, at the time, whereby the Chancery secretaries informed the AD Times of all appointments made by the Bishop. The list of appointments, including Michael's, appeared in the next issue of the paper. As you might imagine, the father went ballistic. He came to the Chancery once again. He was accompanied by his pastor, Joe Smith, and two of his sons, one of whom had been involved in the incident. He complained bitterly that someone as evil as Mike was now being honored by the Church. There was no way to convince him that the renewal of the faculties was hardly an honor.

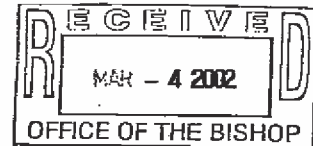
After the meeting I gave Deacon John Murphy a list of priests whose names or pictures should not appear in the paper without his calling the office first to discuss it.

Now comes the problem. Michael is observing the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination this year. The AD Times does a special feature each year on the priest jubilarians of the Diocese. If Michael's picture and biography appear, it's a sure thing that Mr. [REDACTED] will be banging on the door once again. On the other hand, if no mention of Michael is made in the paper, it creates another problem.

Do you have any advice for handling the matter.

On January 6, 2002, the *Boston Globe* generated national publicity on the issue of child sexual abuse within the Archdiocese of Boston. In February 2002, Lawrence wrote to Cullen. Lawrence stated that, "in light of recent events and at the suggestion of Monsignor Alfred Schlert," he wished to retire. Lawrence was granted a retirement and received a pension and healthcare benefits.

Rev. Michael S. Lawrence  
Holy Family Villa  
1325 Prospect Ave.  
Bethlehem, Pa. 18018



February 27, 2002

Most Rev. Edward P. Cullen, D.D.  
Bishop of Allentown  
4029 W. Tilghman St.  
P. O. Box F  
Allentown, Pa. 18105

Dear Bishop,

In light of recent events and at the suggestion of Monsignor Alfred Schlert and Monsignor John McCann I am writing to formally request retirement.

Both the Vicar General and the Chancellor have expressed a real concern for me in this matter and conveyed to me your compassion as well. For this I am truly grateful. You can be assured of my prayers for you as you strive to be a good shepherd to your flock. I ask that you would remember me in your prayers as well.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Michael S. Lawrence".

Rev. Michael S. Lawrence

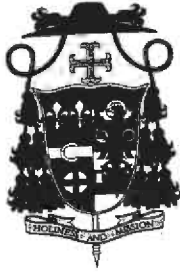


The "In Light of Recent Events" Letter

In spite of a documented confession to child molestation, Bishops Joseph McShea, Thomas Welsh, and Edward Cullen permitted Lawrence to remain in active ministry within the Diocese with all of the authority and trust of a priest serving on the Tribunal. The Diocese took no action to warn parents or parishioners of the Diocese that a predator was in their midst.

The 12-year-old boy who reported his abuse to his father in 1982 was not Lawrence's only victim. In November 2009, the Diocese received another report of abuse at the hands of Lawrence. A victim called to report that he had been sexually assaulted on one occasion by Lawrence. He reported that Lawrence fondled his genitals when he was approximately 13 years of age. Lawrence was confronted with the complaint by the Diocese. He contested the age of the boy at the time and indicated that he believed he was 16 or older. Lawrence also indicated that he often helped the children dress in costumes for parish productions. To the degree contact occurred, Lawrence claimed it was accidental. There is no indication that the Diocese notified the victim of Lawrence's earlier confession to molesting a child in 1982. Moreover, there is no indication that Barres told the Vatican of Lawrence's earlier crime or his related confession when the matter was brought to the attention of the Holy See.

In December 2014, Barres notified the Vatican by letter that he would not seek the removal of Lawrence from the priesthood. He recommended that he remain in retired status. Lawrence died in April 2015.



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16 December 2014

Archbishop J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P.  
Titular Archbishop of Oregon City  
Adjunct Secretary  
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
Pallazzo del S. Uffizio  
00120 Vatican City State

Re: Prot. No. 486/2004-45204  
Prot. No. 486/2004-36902

Your Excellency:

I write in response to your letter of 14 January 2014 requesting further documentation, including the priest's written response to the more recent allegations made against him.

By mandate of Father Michael Lawrence dated April 3, 2014, the Reverend David Szatkowski, SCJ, was appointed his canonical Procurator and Advocate and accepted by me on April 22, 2014. From the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2014, Father Szatkowski interviewed Father Lawrence in order to receive his response to the additional accusations which were made against him and communicated to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 22 September 2011 (cf. Prot. No. 486/2004-36902). Father Szatkowski wrote a thirty-two (32) page response on June 17, 2014 and received on June 23, 2014, which I enclose in Appendix A.

Father Michael Lawrence does not dispute the general circumstances under which the accuser "JM" claimed that an act of sexual abuse occurred more than twenty-eight years ago. He does dispute factual details, such as the age of the accuser and the presence or absence of others when the alleged act was to have occurred. He does confirm the detail that he was to assist in the costuming of the children involved in the parish play, confirms his presence in the sacristy for this purpose, and "realizes that physical contact with JM could have happened." He denies any accusation of fondling or inappropriate touch. This admission ties into a 2008 psychological report, hereafter referred to as the "Anodos Report." One relevant page of this report, concerning this accusation, was submitted in 2011. At that time, the entire report was not submitted, prompting your Dicastery's request for more information.

On page 13 of his "Advocate Brief," Reverend Szatkowski cites this "Anodos Report." His citation concerns the doctor's observation that "he had arranged a situation in which he was able to be with boys in a dressing room for a play where he could surreptitiously observe and touch them." Father Lawrence contests this part of the report- made three years before the allegation was made- in disputing the doctor's observation that he lacks remorse.

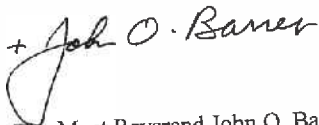
The Advocate's Brief then turns its attention to Father Lawrence's "second time of therapy" at Saint John Vianney Center which he wishes to emphasize "did not relate in any way to sexual misconduct... but to resolve problems with anger directed at parish staff."

Also enclosed with my Votum, in Appendix B, is a Psychological Assessment of Father Lawrence, written to his Advocate on June 10, 2014, and a statement by the Director of the permanent residence where Father Michael Lawrence lives a permanent life of prayer and penance.

Having prayed over the matter, and having studied the Brief of his Advocate and the current assessment of the psychologist, I have concluded that it is best that the Reverend Michael Lawrence remain under this supervised way of life.

It is my hope that my opinion offered herein will serve to alleviate your Congregation from further action in this matter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John O. Barres". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

The Most Reverend John O. Barres, D.D.  
Bishop of Allentown