

# Father Jerry (John) Kucan

## Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1924
YEAR OF DEATH:	2010
ORDINATION:	June 24, 1951

## Employment/Assignment History

1952-1954	St. Anthony's, Sharon, PA
1954-1961	St. Joseph's, Bethlehem, PA
1961-1972	St. Mary's, Steelton, PA
1972-1973	Our Lady of Peace Friary, Beaver Falls, PA
1973-1977	St. Anthony's, Sharon, PA
1977-1978	Sacred Heart, Milwaukee, WI
1978-1979	Beaver Falls Friary, Beaver Falls, PA
1979-1982	St. Mary's, Steelton, PA
1982-1985	St. Jerome's, Chicago, IL
1985-1986	Sacred Heart, Milwaukee, WI
1986-1988	St. Anthony's, Chicago, IL
1988-1994	At. Augustine's, West Allis, WI
1994-1995	Sacred Heart, Chicago, IL
1995-2005	St. Anthony's Friary, Chicago, IL

## Summary

In February of 2005, a thirty-nine-year-old man wrote a letter to the Diocese of Erie in which he stated that he had attended St. Anthony's School in Sharon, Pennsylvania and that in 1974 he began serving midnight mass. Victim #1 stated that "Father Jerry" began an inappropriate relationship with him at that time. Victim #1 wrote that Father Jerry gave him a St. Christopher necklace as a gift and soon afterward the inappropriate behavior began. The letter said that Kucan instructed Victim #1 to serve morning mass before school, at which time the behavior continued. Victim #1 wrote that he would be called out of class at times, where he would meet with Father Jerry and a Brother who wore a brown robe. These "meetings" would take place in a room on the second floor of the gym. The letter explained that Kucan told Victim #1 that if he ever told anyone about their relationship, Victim #1's mother would lose her job in the school kitchen and he would be kicked out of school. Victim #1 wrote in the letter that he would go to confession weekly to confess his sins and that Kucan would tell him that the slate was wiped clean. Victim #1 stated in his letter that he was now having trouble dealing with many issues such as trust, intimacy, and questioning of his sexual orientation. Victim #1 asked if the Diocese had an assistance program available for those suffering from such emotional difficulties.

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In March of 2005, Bishop Donald Trautman wrote back to Victim #1. The Bishop stated that St. Anthony's Croatian Catholic Church in Sharon was staffed by Croatian Franciscan priests at the time in question and that "Father Jerry" could have been Father Jerry Kucan. The Bishop stated that after he received Victim #1's letter, he called and spoke to Father Marko Puljic of the Croatian Franciscan Custody of the Holy Family of the United States and Canada. The Bishop said that he read Victim #1's letter to Puljic and that he asked Puljic to call Victim #1. The Bishop stated that he was sending Victim #1's letter, along with the Bishop's return letter, to Puljic. The Bishop then stated that Kucan was not a priest of the Erie Diocese and the resolution of the matter rested with the Croatian Franciscans. The Bishop then wrote that Victim #1 should contact Catholic Charities in Dallas, where he lived at the time, to help with his emotional difficulties. The Bishop included a phone number for the Director of that office.

In June of 2005, Father Puljic received a letter from Attorney Richard Serbin of the Law Firm Serbin, Kovacs & Nypaver of Altoona, PA. The letter advised Puljic that the firm had been retained by Victim #1 on this matter and described Kucan's "inappropriate behavior" in detail. This letter stated that Victim #1 was eight years old when he met Kucan and that Kucan thereafter molested the boy on a regular basis. This letter stated that Kucan would take Victim #1 to the second floor of the gym, where Kucan would perform oral sex on the eight year old. The letter also alleged that Kucan would have a brother in a brown robe present on some occasions and that this brother would also perform oral sex on Victim #1. The letter stated that Victim #1 was currently undergoing counseling.

The letter concluded with Attorney Serbin stating that he had represented individuals that had been victims of clergy abuse for eighteen years. He stated that it was his policy to "*attempt amicable resolution of all claims on behalf of my clients prior to filing suit. I have been able to achieve settlements on behalf of abuse victims with multiple Dioceses and religious communities. I have found that when there is a sincere desire on the part of the church leaders to correct wrongs of the past, recognition of the long term effects of clergy abuse upon victims, and reasonableness on part of all parties, that these cases can be resolved without resorting to the courts. It is my sincere hope that the Croatian Franciscans will accept responsibility for Father Jerry Kucan, and do the right thing by [Victim #1] in fairly compensating him for the horrible injuries that he has suffered as a result of his abuse.*" It appears as though Victim #1 did attend counseling at the Catholic Charities in Dallas, which was set up by the Diocese of Erie. In 2016, Victim #1 wrote to the Erie Diocese seeking to obtain counseling/progress notes that his Dallas counselor had provided to the Erie Diocese.

On January 8, 2007, Vicar General, Monsignor Robert J. Smith received a letter from a woman who stated that her husband had been molested by a priest in the mid 1950's when he served as an altar boy at St. Anthony's on Idaho Street in Sharon. The letter stated that her husband's cousins were also victims. This writer stated in the letter that her husband committed suicide in 1993 after a long struggle with depression. She had spoken to her husband's therapist after his death and the therapist told her that her husband's severe depression was a direct result of being molested at St. Anthony's as a child. The writer stated that she has heard that other men who were molested at St. Anthony's had committed suicide. She stated that she knew that the offending priest was now dead, but that the Catholic Church was not excused for the abuse. She

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concluded her letter by asking Monsignor Smith how she could see any other reports on cases similar to this.

On January 16, 2007, Monsignor Smith responded. In his letter, Monsignor Smith writes that he was very sorry to hear about the molestation of the writer's husband as a young boy in the 1950s and his subsequent suicide in 1993. The letter then stated that Monsignor Smith was not aware of the priest who may have committed the crime against her husband. The letter stated that St. Anthony's was staffed by priests from the Croatian Franciscan Custody of the Holy Family and that the priest who abused her husband most probably was from that order. The letter contained the name and address of Father Marko Puljic for her to contact.

The letter then addresses apparent requests made by the writer. Smith wrote "*Regarding your request for reports of other like incidents in the parish, two others have come to our attention over the years. The first involved a Croatian Franciscan assigned to the parish in the early 70s. The report came to us in February 2005. The Diocese notified the Croatian Provincial on March 1<sup>st</sup>, got back to the individual several days later and offered him counseling assistance. The second incident involved another Croatian Franciscan. It allegedly happened in the mid 80's. One of our Episcopal Vicars serving in the Western Vicariate was made aware of it, reported it to then Bishop Michael Murphy and the priest was removed immediately from the ministry.*" Smith was contacted by a social service agency in Florida after this second Croatian Franciscan had applied for a secular position there. Smith called the Director and advised them that a complaint of abuse had been filed against the individual, that he had been removed from the ministry when it was reported, and that he had left the religious order. The letter concluded with this paragraph: "*Bishop Trautman has been our bishop since 1990. He has been vigilant and aggressive in dealing with this tragic issue. Sexual abuse is abhorrent to all of us and when committed by a trusted member of the church, doubly so.*"

A file-note contained within the files claimed that on January 25, 2007, Bishop Trautman notified Attorney Frank Kroto about the recent complaint from Victim #1, as well as a complaint from another man. The file note states that Bishop Trautman asked Attorney Kroto to inform District Attorney Bradley Foulk of the complaints, the identity of the priests, and the names of the alleged victims. Kroto was also asked to assure the DA that the Diocese would comply with any requests for additional facts and information.

A file note showed that on July 31, 2007, Vicar General Smith wrote that he spoke with Father Marko Puljic to get an update on Kucan and to determine when he was removed from the ministry. Puljic said that Father Kucan was taken out of the ministry in March 2005, when the Order received its first complaint against him. The Order settled with Victim #1 filing the complaint. The file note also indicated that Kucan was then in his mid- eighties and in the early stages of dementia.

There is nothing contained in this file that shows that any actual correspondence between the Church and the District Attorney occurred.