

Reverend John P. Connor

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1934
YEAR OF DEATH:	N/A
ORDINATION:	April 4, 1962

Employment/Assignment History

4/28/1962	Assistant, St. Francis of Assisi, Vineland, NJ
1/08/1966	Assistant, St. Mary, Gloucester, NJ
6/18/1966	Assistant in Residence, St. Rose of Lima, Haddon Heights, NJ
6/18/1966	Faculty, Paul VI High School, Haddon Township, NJ
1969-1970	Assistant CYO Director of Diocese, Diocese Center
1970-1985	Chairperson, Bishop Eustace Preparatory, Pennsauken Township, NJ
2/2002	Removed from active ministry/retirement

Summary

Records obtained by subpoena from the Diocese of Pittsburgh, show that in October of 1984, Father John P. Connor was arrested in New Jersey for sexually molesting a 14-year-old child. The sexual abuse for which Connor was apprehended took place in Connor's home in the Diocese of Camden during the time he was a theology teacher and golf coach at Bishop Eustace Preparatory School in Pennsauken. According to the 2005 Philadelphia Grand Jury Report, Connor never went to trial on the charges because lawyers for the Diocese of Camden negotiated a pretrial intervention with the Cape May Prosecutor's Office. The terms of the agreement were that if Connor would admit to sexually molesting the 14-year-old child, he would have the record of his arrest erased, as long as he were not re-arrested within one year. In Connor's Diocesan file, a letter dated March 29, 1985 from the Office of the Prosecutor, County of Cape May to Connor's attorney stated:

[W]e have placed explicit reliance on the internal discipline of the institutional church in assuring that Father Connor takes all the steps reasonably necessary to live up to the letter and the spirit of the Participations Agreement—even after the period of court supervision expires.

The subpoenaed Diocesan files contained several memoranda and letters from the Southdown Institute outside of Toronto, Canada where Connor spent approximately eight months in treatment after his arrest. The documents from Southdown indicated an assessment that because of Connor's problem with alcohol: "*he acts out sexually with some preference to late adolescent males.*" They specifically warned against giving Connor responsibility for adolescents. In a September 3, 1985 memorandum to Bishop George Guilfoyle of Camden from the Executive Director of Southdown specifically cautioned that "*because of the incident for*

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which he was apprehended, we would not recommend any ministry that would directly put him in a positions of responsibility for adolescents such as a teaching situation.”

In a letter dated September 11, 1985, Guilfoyle, wrote to Bishop Anthony Bevilacqua, the Bishop of Pittsburgh asking if Bevilacqua would consider accepting Connor. Guilfoyle later acknowledged in a letter dated September 12, 1985 that he could not keep Connor in Camden stating; *“If it were not for the matter of scandal, I would be willing to keep him here.”*

In a memorandum dated September 11, 1985 to Bevilacqua, Father Nicholas Dattilo expressed several concerns about the request from Guilfoyle. Dattilo specifically pointed out that: *“If the problem is homosexuality or pedophilia we could be accepting a difficulty with which we have had no post-therapeutic experience.”* He also stated in this memorandum:

If, after you have talked with Bishop Guilfoyle you believe there is no serious risk in accepting Father Connor, we will do everything we can to keep the tradition of bishops helping bishops intact.

It should be noted that there is a hand-written note at the bottom of the memo which reads: *“I cannot guarantee that there is no serious risk.”* It is initialed “AJB” (Anthony Joseph Bevilacqua) and dated September 17, 1985. Despite this acknowledgement, and after receiving reports from Southdown. Bevilacqua agreed to give Connor an assignment in the Diocese.

According to the 2005 Philadelphia Grand Jury Report, an additional memorandum dated September 11, 1985 from Dattilo documented his concern about bringing Connor to the Diocese which stressed the *“serious consequences of recurrence”* given *“the nature of the incident for which he was apprehended.”* Bevilacqua initialed this memorandum and added a note stating; *“He must also be told that his pastor/supervisor will be informed confidentially of his situation.”* There is no documentation regarding this September 1985 memorandum in the file that was provided by the Diocese.

In a letter to Connor dated October 9, 1985, Bevilacqua appointed him as Chaplain to the Catholic patients at Sewickley Valley Hospital and assigned him to reside at St. James.

However, less than a year later, in a letter dated September 5, 1986, Bevilacqua informed Connor that he had appointed another priest as Chaplain at Sewickley Valley Hospital, and reassigned Connor to St. Alphonsus in Wexford. Connor’s new assignment gave him an unrestricted ministry. There was no warning to the parishioners of the church that he was an admitted child molester.

According to Philadelphia Grand Jury Report, after Bevilacqua left Pittsburgh to become the Archbishop of Philadelphia, Dattilo revoked Connor’s assignment citing *“legal complications”* and suggested Connor apply to the Philadelphia Diocese since Bevilacqua had been willing to accept Connor before. In a memorandum to Connor dated September 7, 1988, Bevilacqua appointed him as assistant pastor of St. Matthew in Conshohocken, a parish with a grade school. Bevilacqua encouraged Connor, among other things, to *“educate youth.”* Once

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again Connor was given an unrestricted ministry and there was no warning to the parishioners of the church that Connor was an admitted child molester.

According to the Philadelphia Grand Jury Report, Bevilacqua told the Grand Jury that he recalled Connor calling him directly to request the new assignment in Conshohocken. He stated that while he asked Monsignor Samuel Shoemaker to handle the appointment, he did not recall whether he had told Shoemaker about Connor's history. An excerpt from the 2005 Grand Jury Report reads as follows:

Bevilacqua and the Philadelphia Archdiocese accepted this dangerous priest readily but did nothing to ensure the propriety of his future conduct. Father James W. Donlon, the pastor of St. Matthew Church since March 1989, testified to the Grand Jury that Cardinal Bevilacqua never told him about Father Connor's arrest or that he had been treated at Southdown for abusing alcohol and a 14-year old boy. The Archbishop met with Father Donlon for a half hour in February 1989 to familiarize Father Donlon with his new parish. Rather than share information that might have aided the pastor in protecting the children of St. Matthew, Archbishop Bevilacqua chose to say that Father Connor was brought from Pittsburgh to be closer to his family. Moreover, Father Donlon was given no guidance as to what activities Father Connor should or should not participate in, even though the Southdown report that Cardinal Bevilacqua had received explicitly recommended that Father Connor not be put in a position of responsibility for adolescents. Since Father Donlon received no warning from the Archbishop, he allowed Father Connor full access to the youth of the parish. The pastor did not know to be concerned about an especially close relationship that was developing between Father Connor and a young boy from the parish grade school, named "Timothy."

The Grand Jury further heard that Archbishop Bevilacqua also neglected to tell that pastor that Father Connor had a history of alcohol abuse and that Southdown had warned that excessive use of alcohol could increase the risk that the priest would act out sexually with adolescents. Thus, when Father Connor continued to drink, Father Donlon did not know to be especially concerned.

Donlon also told the Grand Jury that it was not until a newspaper reporter called him in 2002 that he became aware of Connor's arrest for the sexual abuse of a minor. Donlon explained to the Grand Jury that he "would have been more careful about everything" meaning Connor's activities and his association with the school.

The Grand Jury report went on to say that "Timothy," the child from St. Matthew in Conshohocken to whom Connor was paying a great deal of attention, had been located and was now 24 years old. Although Timothy did not openly admit to the sexual abuse, he claimed that from third grade until the beginning of high school Connor took him, once a week, to the movies, dinner, bowling and golfing and that Connor bought him golf clubs and a bike.

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In 1993, Connor was suddenly moved back to Camden because his 1984 victim of sexual abuse had sued and received a settlement from the Diocese of Camden.

In 1994, it was reported that Connor (who was assigned to a church in New Jersey) was still continuing to visit “Timothy” in Conshohocken weekly to take him on trips and give him gifts. Monsignor Lynn called Camden Chancellor and the Archdiocese attorney to notify them of Connor’s “*imprudent*” behavior, but according to the Grand Jury Report, there was still no attempt to notify Timothy’s mother that Connor was an admitted child molester.

In 1995, Father John Kelly, the parochial vicar at St. Matthew reported that Connor was back in the parish and still in “Timothy’s” life. The 2005 Grand Jury report quoted Lynn as saying: “*I told Father Kelly that all I could do was inform the Camden Diocese, as I did before, that Connor was back in the picture with this young boy here in Conshohocken.*”

Included in the file for Connor that was provided by the Diocese, is a letter to Father Ronald P. Lengwin, from Father Peter Murphy, pastor of St. Alphonsus. Murphy’s letter stated that on October 27, 2008 a man called the rectory. The caller apparently wanted the current priest to apologize to the whole church during the homily for assigning Connor to the church and about the terrible things Connor did. When the man was asked if he had been abused by Connor, he said he had. Murphy told the man to call the Diocese of Pittsburgh to make the accusation.

In a memorandum dated November 5, 2008 to Diocesan Assistance Coordinator Rita Flaherty, Lengwin stated that he spoke to the Allegheny County District Attorney’s Office on October 27, 2008 about an allegation of sexual abuse made against Connor. There was concern that a threat was being made against the church and was asking for help on how to deal with it.

More recently, in the files obtained from the Diocese, there is a letter to Bishop David Zubik dated December 18, 2014 from an attorney who represented a victim who claimed that he was repeatedly sexually molested by Connor from approximately 1986 to 1988 when he was a 12 to 14 years of age. During that time, Connor was assigned to St. Alphonsus. The male, then 40 years old, claimed that Connor ruined his life and that Connor stole his innocence. The letter stated that the victim suffered from trust issues, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, alcohol abuse, estrangement from the Catholic Church, guilt, shame, embarrassment, etc. As a result of his suffering, the victim demanded a settlement for \$1 million. .

In a “*Confidential Memorandum*” to the Diocese file dated January 21, 2015, Flaherty stated that she and Father Mark Eckman phoned Father Terry Odien, the current Vicar for Clergy in the Diocese of Camden, to alert him of the allegations they had received. Odien advised that Connor was out of active ministry and living in a retirement facility for priests. They also called the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and spoke to Monsignor Daniel Sullivan to inform him of the recent allegations. Flaherty stated, “*we had little information about him [the victim] and that we have had no contact with the alleged victim.*”

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The subpoenaed Diocesan files contain little to no information on the victim's status or whether he was offered counseling. The Grand Jury investigation found little to no documentation that the Dioceses of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia or Camden notified local law enforcement or the District Attorney's office about Connor's sexual abuse.