

Reverend Ferdinand B. Demsher

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1914
YEAR OF DEATH:	1983
ORDINATION:	May 25, 1946

Employment/Assignment History

8/22/1946 – 7/16/1947	St. Peter, New Kensington, PA
7/17/1947 – 6/29/1949	Christ the King, Ambridge, PA
6/30/1949 – 5/20/1951	St. James, West End, PA
5/20/1951 – 6/29/1963	United States Army
7/02/1963 – 6/06/1966	Resurrection, Brookline, PA
6/07/1966 – 6/24/1983	St. Mary of the Assumption, Pittsburgh, PA

Summary

Documents subpoenaed from the Diocese of Pittsburgh revealed that on March 18, 2002, a victim contacted the Diocese via e-mail to report sexual abuse by Father Ferdinand Demsher. The victim stated that the abuse occurred from 1975 to 1976 at St. Mary of the Assumption church. The victim was approximately 13 to 14 years old at that time.

Demsher died in 1983.

According to the victim, his grandparents arranged for him to be employed at St. Mary doing odd jobs for Demsher. One summer day, he complained of a heat rash on his inner thigh. Demsher offered to look at the rash, and the victim remembered being in Demsher's office in the rectory with his pants down. He stated that Demsher had "*manipulated his penis until it was hard*" and when he could no longer "*stand it he ejaculated.*" The victim stated that he knew it was wrong, but "*he [Demsher] could cause problems for me.*" Demsher continued this pattern of abuse while the victim had the heat rash.

The victim further claimed that Demsher attempted to manipulate him into sexually touching him [Demsher] by using a ruse related to a prostate check. He explained:

[Demsher] would stick a finger into his anus and massage the prostate until he [Demsher] would ejaculate and this would "help open his urinary tract." He [Demsher] said I [the victim] had large hands and my long fingers could reach the prostate muscle.

Demsher also asked the victim to massage his back thighs and buttocks to ease Demsher's sciatic nerve pain.

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One of the victim's job duties was to straighten up clutter on the second floor of the rectory. He related:

[A]t some point I don't remember exactly how it happened but he had managed to get me naked in his bed and was manipulating me with a hand held electrical vibrator and after as long as I could try to hold out I ejaculated. He took off his cloths (sic) and I ended up doing the same thing to him. This was the first time I had ever manipulated his penis to orgasm.

The abuse finally ended when the boy started Lawrenceville Catholic High School as a freshman. He got a different job at a country club and made excuses as to why he could no longer visit the rectory.

The victim requested counseling from the Diocese. An internal Dioesan memorandum dated April 4, 2002 ended with "*we found [the victim's] allegation to be credible.*"

In May 2005, the victim contacted the Diocese again seeking assistance in the form of counseling because of the sexual abuse he suffered. There were several documents in the file which reflected that the victim participated in therapy. The Diocese also agreed to cover the cost of tuition for his daughters to attend Catholic school in the Florida area.

On March 12, 2012, an individual called the Diocese to report that a male friend had been molested by Demsher as a child in the late-1970's to early-1980's. Rita Flaherty, the Diocesan Assistance Coordinator, gave the individual contact information to forward to her friend. The individual provided the potential victim's first name. Diocesan documents do not reveal that this potential victim contacted the Diocese.

In February 2015, a confidential memorandum was prepared regarding a complaint of sexual abuse by Demsher. On February 4, 2015, a second victim met with Bishop William J. Waltersheid and Flaherty to discuss allegations of abuse. In that complaint, he advised that Demsher engaged in sexual activity with him while he was approximately 14 years old. He stated that the abuse occurred when he was a freshman at Central Catholic High School. The victim explained that the first time that he went to pick up his report card from Demsher, the victim had a cold. According to the memorandum, "*Demsher told [the victim] he had been a chaplain in the Army. (Somehow he must have implied or given the impression from that comment that he knew how the victim] should take care of his cold.)*" The victim was instructed by Demsher to drop his pants and Demsher then began to fondle his genitals.

The second victim reported that Demsher also fondled his genitals the second time that he had to pick up his report card. By the time he had to pick up his third report card, the victim asked a friend to go with him. Demsher again "*made the suggestion about 'examining him']*." In response, the victim explained that his friend was waiting outside, and Demsher did not attempt to fondle his genitals that day. As a result of the abuse, the victim's grades began to

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drop, and he lost faith in the Catholic Church. He was offered counseling, which he ultimately accepted.

In a “*Confidential Memorandum*” to Demsher’s file dated February 1, 2016, it was noted that a third victim claimed to have been fondled by Demsher when he was approximately 10 to 11 years old. This victim had attended Resurrection grade school and had been an altar server for the parish. The notes regarding the allegation did not provide any further information or details of the abuse. On February 11, 2016, Flaherty contacted the victim again to offer him counseling.

In February 2015, the Diocese notified the Allegheny County District Attorney’s Office that a complaint of sexual abuse by Demsher had been made to the Diocese. The Diocese stated that the activities occurred in 1964-1965 at a church in Allegheny County.

In a “*Confidential Memorandum*” dated April 27, 2016, it was noted that a fourth victim called to report sexual abuse by Demsher. In the complaint, this victim reported that Demsher abused him in the mid-late 1960’s. The memorandum did not provide a detailed account of the abuse. The victim further advised that Demsher took him and several other boys to Wildwood, New Jersey and provided alcohol to them on two occasions. On one occasion, another boy started to choke on his own vomit as a result of drinking too much alcohol. Flaherty attempted to set up a meeting with the victim to further discuss the abuse allegation, however the victim cancelled several times. The victim indicated that although he knew it was the right thing to do, “*I am fighting with myself about doing it. I guess it is my ‘Catholic guilt.’*” On May 20, 2016, the Diocese notified the Allegheny County District Attorney’s Office that a complaint of sexual abuse by Demsher had been made to the Diocese. The Diocese provided the fourth victim with financial help on September 9, 2016.