

Father Richard J. Dorsch

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1944
YEAR OF DEATH:	N/A
ORDINATION:	May, 1970

Employment/Assignment History

6/15/1970-5/20/1975	Parochial Vicar, St. Basil, Carrick, PA
5/21/1975-10/12/1977	Parochial Vicar, St. Philip, Crafton, PA
10/13/1977-3/07/1983	Parochial Vicar, All Saints, Etna, PA
3/08/1983-5/25/1985	Parochial Vicar, St. Michael, Butler, PA
6/26/1985-9/23/1991	Pastor, St. Francis De Sale, McKees Rocks, PA,
9/23/1991-2/07/1994	Administrator, St. Coleman, Turtle Creek, PA
2/07/1994-8/26/1994	Team Ministry, Risen Lord, Pittsburgh, PA
8/26/1994	Leave of Absence
5/28/1996	Withdrawn from Ministry

Summary

In early August 1994, a 13-year-old boy was taken by his parents for a routine physical examination. During the examination, the boy disclosed to his doctor that he was sexually assaulted by Father Richard Dorsch. The doctor informed the victim's mother of the assault and reported it to Children & Youth Services in Allegheny County. The Allegheny County Police Department thereafter initiated an investigation into the complaint.

At the time of the victim's complaint, Dorsch was serving as pastor at the Risen Lord on the North Side of Pittsburgh. It was determined that the sexual assault of the victim took place at "North Park" in Allegheny County on August 2, 1994. An investigation by law enforcement resulted in Dorsch's arrest on August 26, 1994.

Dorsch's arrest prompted the Diocese of Pittsburgh to place him on administrative leave. Arrangements were then made to send Dorsch to St. Luke Institute in Suitland, Maryland for an evaluation. The evaluation was scheduled for the week of October 9, 1994.

On August 26, 1994 - - the day of Dorsch's arrest - - a meeting was held with Dorsch and officials with the Diocese regarding the victim's allegations. Handwritten notes from the Diocesan file detailed what occurred during this meeting. Dorsch admitted to "inappropriately" touching the victim, holding him longer than necessary, and sitting the victim on his (Dorsch's) lap while stroking the victim's stomach and touching his nipples. When asked if he touched the victim's genitals, Dorsch replied, "*I didn't touch his genitals . . . I don't think I did?*" Dorsch also admitted during the meeting that he had always been attracted to young boys, but that he had been able to control this attraction by making sure he was never alone with them.

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In April 1995, a jury convicted Dorsch of two counts of indecent assault and one count of corrupting the morals of a minor. On June 23, 1995, Dorsch was sentenced to 11 ½ to 23 months incarceration. However, only a week later (June 30, 1995), Dorsch was released on parole and admitted back to St. Luke Institute in Maryland.

In a letter dated June 29, 1995 from Rita Flaherty of the Diocese to a physician at St. Luke Institute, Flaherty wrote, *inter alia*:

I look forward to working with you and maintaining the excellent working relationship that the Diocese of Pittsburgh currently has with St. Luke Institute. I also want to thank you for "going the extra mile" on behalf of Father Richard Dorsch.

Flaherty continued the letter by stating, "Again, I thank you and all of the staff at St. Luke Institute for all that you do for the priests of our diocese."

On December 9, 1994, a handwritten letter was sent to Father Guay by another victim. In his letter, a second victim indicated he was sexually assaulted by Dorsch at the All Saints church in Etna when he was 10 years old. The victim indicated the assaults first occurred in the spring of 1981 and that on the first such occasion, Dorsch had the victim touch his (Dorsch's) bare chest, while Dorsch kissed the victim on the head.

Dorsch thereafter began taking the second victim to a racquetball club in Shaler. After playing racquetball, Dorsch and the victim would sit naked in a hot tub together and Dorsch would put his hand on the victim's leg under the water. In the fall of 1991, Dorsch reportedly sat in the hot tub and fondled the victim's genitals by sitting the victim on his lap and placing his hands on the victim's penis and testicles. During the following weeks, Dorsch assaulted the second victim at the church by placing his hand down his pants and, again, fondling his genital area.

On another occasion, the second victim went to Moraine State Park with Dorsch and three or four other youths. While swimming in a lake, one of the other boys, who the victim told Diocesan officials he could identify, complained that Dorsch had tried to fondle his testicles.

The second victim indicated that Dorsch's sexual abuse stopped only when Dorsch was transferred from All Saints when the victim was in eighth grade. He estimated that, in total, Dorsch assaulted him on 50 to 70 separate occasions. The second victim later filed a lawsuit against the Diocese alleging a decades-long conspiracy to protect priests who molested minors. A review of Dorsch's Diocesan file did not reveal how this lawsuit was ultimately resolved.

Between July and November 1996, the Diocese made various payments and reimbursements to Dorsch, including \$140 for a computer course, \$1,732 for classes and \$622 for student fees at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, and \$2,493 for "courses and books."

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On January 23, 1997, a letter was sent from the Diocese to St. Luke Institute. The letter read, in part:

Dear Bill, As I am sure you are aware, Father Richard Dorsch will be returning to St. Luke's for his second Aftercare workshop the week of February 16 . . . Since Richard's last Aftercare workshop, several new developments have occurred. On a positive note, Richard recently received word that civil charges have been dropped as a result of a mediation process and out of court settlement. This resolution has alleviated a lot of anxiety for Richard regarding his future.

On May 22, 1997, Dorsch wrote a letter to Bishop Donald Wuerl. A portion of the letter read:

Dear Bishop Wuerl, I was speaking with Rita Flaherty today and she informed me that the time period for my receiving an increase in my monthly stipend (\$1,000) has expired. She suggested that I write you if I need an extension on this benefit.

There was a handwritten notation on this letter which read, "5/30 called Richard to give O.K. by Bishop W."

On May 30, 1997, a letter was sent to Dorsch confirming that he would continue to receive a monthly sustenance check of \$1,000 from the Diocese. Dorsch continued to receive monthly sustenance checks from the Diocese from the year of his conviction through 2009. In total, Dorsch received \$159,700.00 in "sustenance" payments.

On July 6, 2000, a letter regarding Dorsch was sent from Father James Ruggiero, Episcopal Vicar for Clergy and Religious, to Father Douglas Nowicki of St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe. In the letter, Ruggiero acknowledged that Dorsch had been arrested and convicted of molesting a 13-year-old boy. In the letter, Ruggiero asked for Nowicki's assistance in getting Dorsch a job in an infirmary setting within a "religious community." Ruggiero further added that Dorsch was trying to stay out of the Pittsburgh area to avoid causing any additional scandal for the Diocese. In asking for Nowicki's assistance, Ruggiero stated, "It would be greatly appreciated by Bishop Wuerl, myself and all those in the Clergy Office . . . His salary would not need to be large. It could be subsidized by the diocese."

On May 20, 2002, Rita Flaherty, Diocesan Assistance Coordinatr, sent a letter to Dorsch. A portion of the letter read,

I am embarrassed that only now am I responding to your February 25 letter. At about the time your letter arrived, I was knee deep in work related to fallout from the Boston situation. Lent and Easter have passed me by. On day runs into the next and now it is May. These past few months have been very difficult.

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So many people are in pain with lives being turned upside down. By far, this is the most difficult time I have ever spent in the clergy office since I started there over eight years ago. Your support and prayers are deeply appreciated. Should a circumstance arise where a priest feels the need to speak to someone who has travelled the same journey as you, I will not hesitate to pass along your name. I'm sure that all the media attention related to clergy misconduct has also been difficult for you. . . I'm sure your example and courage in facing your own situation would be a tremendous witness to the many priests who are new to facing an uncertain future.

On February 25, 2004, a Pittsburgh law firm sent a letter to Wuerl informing him of yet another reported victim of Dorsch. The victim who was an adult in 2004, reported through the law firm that when he was in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades, he was repeatedly sexually assaulted by Dorsch. This third victim, who served as an altar boy and attended a school associated with All Saints, described how after Dorsch taught him to play racquetball at the gym, he would make him sit on his lap in the hot tub. After masses at church, Dorsch would take the victim to play board games and put his hands down the victim's pants. On other occasions, Dorsch would take him for car rides and make the victim touch him sexually while he drove.

On February 27, 2004, Counsel for the Diocese sent a letter responding to the law firm. The letter read, in part, “

I have been asked to respond initially to your letter on behalf of Bishop Wuerl. The matter that you presented in your letter is tragic and very sad. The Diocese of Pittsburgh is concerned utmost about the safety and well-being of children, victims and their families.

On July 20, 2008, the third victim wrote a letter to the Diocese outlining the sexual assaults committed against him by Dorsch. In his letter, he explained how he was sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by Dorsch from 1982 to 1985 while he was a student at All Saints and an altar boy at All Saints church. The abuse occurred a year after his father had passed away. The letter describes one particularly damaging assault by Dorsch.

One occasion stands out due to the violent intensity of the abuse, sexual, physical and emotional. Dorsch led me down to a trail, then known as the “Braille Trail” (located in North Park/Allegheny County), saying he wanted to teach me how blind people read. This incident replayed itself and resulted in my attempt to take my own life the night of Friday, 20 June 2008. That day on the trail back in 1983, Dorsch had me close my eyes. He guided my hand across a Braille sign. Then, his hand squeezed tight on mine. He forcibly restrained me. I said,

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“Father, that hurts!” He said, “It’s going to be okay” as he gripped my hand around his penis. I cried out through tears, “No, Father!” His grip got even tighter and he kept his hand clasped around mine as he forced me to masturbate him to ejaculate. I was sobbing, I felt disgusting. He said this is what made our love special, and that only he and I were to know. He always said that, as if to threaten me.

The victim further informed Diocesan officials that he also sexually abused by Dorsch in the sacristy, the rectory, the Shaler Racquetball Court, and in the parking lot of a local shopping center. These sexual assaults reportedly included oral and anal sex.

On July 22, 2008, Dorsch was confronted with the allegations. In a “*Confidential Memorandum*,” Flaherty documented that she asked Dorsch if the allegations were true. Dorsch responded that he did know the victim and admitted he was “*inappropriate with him*.”

In the years following his abuse, the third victim attempted suicide on numerous occasions, including in 2008 and 2009. The Diocese thereafter began paying for his mental health treatment in July 2008, a month after his attempted suicide.

On December 11, 2008, the victim sent an e-mail communication to Flaherty, the contents of which Flaherty forwarded to Bishop Zubik. A portion of the e-mail message read:

Early in the summer this year – in fact, it was the day of the summer solstice itself- I attempted to take my own life. It happened in the wee hours of the morning following a night of heavy drink, which my doctors have explained may have induced an inescapable episodic flashback of sexual abuse, which has haunted me over the years. This time, however, the pain of that flashback I couldn’t stand any longer, and decided that enough was enough. No more pain I thought as I swallowed dozens of pills.

In March 2010, the Diocese announced it would stop paying for the victim’s mental health treatment. On May 4, 2010, the victim committed suicide.

On January 13, 2012, Flaherty and Bishop William John Waltersheid met with yet another victim of Dorsch. The fourth victim, who was 45 years old at the time of the meeting, indicated his abuse by Dorsch occurred when he attended All Saints school. This meeting was memorialized in a “*Confidential Memorandum*” to Bishop Zubik.

The fourth victim reported that when he was in sixth grade, he became an altar server and was considering becoming a priest. He stated that when he was in the seventh and eighth grade, Dorsch began sexually abusing him and that for all his young life, carrying the dark secret of Dorsch's abuse placed a heavy burden on him. As a result of this abuse, by the end of his

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eight grade school year, he was drinking heavily. At his worst, he was drinking a half gallon of vodka per day in the hopes that his drinking would kill him.

The memorandum stated that the fourth victim's "*purpose in coming to meet with us (Flaherty and Waltersheid) was to be able to tell his story and to be heard as a person who mattered.*" He also hoped that the church could help him rebuild his life, as he was homeless. The Diocese ultimately decided to help the victim and paid for a bed and bus pass for him.

On July 2, 2012, Flaherty, at the direction of Waltersheid, contacted a woman whose son was reportedly molested by Dorsch when he served as an altar boy at St. Coleman. The molestation took place when the victim, who was 32 years old at the time of reporting, was 12 to 14 years of age.

The mother of this fifth victim stated that she learned of the molestation when "*Father Dorsch was arrested back in 1994 or 1995.*" She stated that once she became aware of what happened to her son, she approached Father Markell, the parochial vicar assigned at the time with Dorsch at the parish. She stated that Markell discouraged her from pursuing the matter any further and asked her son - "*what did you do?*" - as if to imply he was responsible for or encouraged Dorsch's sexual misconduct. Markell asked them whether they were going to sue the church and instructed her not to take her complaint to the Diocese, as there was nothing they could do or offer.

The fifth victim's mother also told Flaherty, "*she took [her son] to a child psychologist in Monroeville for 2 ½ years. She said she, her husband and daughter also entered family counseling.*" The mother stated that she paid privately for her son's therapy. Flaherty told the mother that as part of the Diocese policy, they have to turn over all allegations of abuse to the District Attorney's Office in the location where the abuse occurred. The mother stated that she would talk to her son.

On July 18, 2012, Flaherty spoke with the mother, who said she had not yet spoken to her son about the matter. She asked Flaherty not to do anything with this information until she spoke with her son.

On July 19, 2012, an Allegation Report listed "*Alleged Victim: John Doe, Age 32, Address Unknown and Accused Priest: (Rev.) Richard Dorsch*" was sent to counsel for the Diocese. Because of the concerns expressed by the victim's mother, the initial report did not identify him by name but only as a "John Doe."

On June 29, 2016, Diocesan officials met with an adult male who reported that when he was 10 to 12 years of age, he was sexually abused by Dorsch. The abuse took place when the victim was a member of St. Coleman. The victim, who was an altar boy and enjoyed basketball, explained how he and Dorsch became friendly after Dorsch would come to his games. He recalled Dorsch giving him gifts and taking pictures of the two of them together. Dorsch soon began fondling the victim in his (Dorsch's) bedroom at the rectory and at the gym.

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The victim also reported he and Dorsch would get into a hot tub together while they were both naked.