

Reverend Richard Lelonis

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1945
YEAR OF DEATH:	N/A
ORDINATION:	May 1, 1971

Employment/Assignment History

6/02/1971-5/30/1974	Parochial Vicar at St. Luke, Carnegie, PA
5/30/1974-5/21/1975	Graduate Studies, USA, Catholic University, Washington, DC
5/21/1975-8/01/1978	Canonical Services Consultant, Diocese of Pittsburgh Pastoral Center, Pittsburgh, PA
8/09/1976-9/01/1977	Spiritual Director, St. Paul Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA
11/15/1977-8/31/1978	Chaplain Motherhouse, Sancta Sophia, Pittsburgh, PA
8/31/1978-5/15/1979	Graduate Studies, USA, Catholic University, Washington, DC
5/15/1979-5/02/1983	Tribunal Judge, Diocese of Pittsburgh Pastoral Center, Pittsburgh, PA
11/20/1981-5/02/1983	Administrator, St. Mathias, Natrona, PA
5/02/1983-10/26/1992	Pastor, St. Mathias, Natrona, PA
2/08/1998-10/26/1992	Administrator, St. Clement, Tarentum, PA
10/26/1992-8/01/1994	Team Minister-Modcrator, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Carnegie, PA
8/01/1994-3/07/1995	Pastor, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Carnegie, PA
9/05/1995-3/06/2000	Canonical Services Consultant/Tribunal Judge, Diocese of Pittsburgh Pastoral Center, Pittsburgh, PA
3/06/2000-2/01/2002	Chaplain Motherhouse, School Sisters of St. Francis Motherhouse, Pittsburgh, PA

Summary

In December 1994 and January 1995, the Diocese of Pittsburgh received letters from an adult male who reported that he had been sexually abused by Father Richard Lelonis for several years beginning when he was 11 to 12 years of age. It continued until he was 15 to 16 years of age.

The victim first met Lelonis after the victim's 15-year-old sister died and Lelonis became involved with his family. After awhile, they went on overnight trips together and Lelonis provided him with alcohol and "dirty" magazines. They also began sleeping together and showering together. Lelonis then began performing oral sex on him. This abuse occurred approximately once a month for a period of years. Once the victim turned 15 or 16 years old, he told Lelonis he wanted the sexual activities to stop and threatened "to tell on" him. In response, Lelonis grabbed him by the throat and threatened to kill him if he told anyone. Lelonis

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also threatened to tell the victim's parents that he was gay and that he [the victim] was the one who initiated and pursued the sexual contact with Lelonis.

According to the file, the victim "*asked nothing of the Diocese*" and that

He made no threats to sue [n]or make his allegations public. His only motivation appeared to be to make someone in the diocese aware of what had occurred. [The victim's] concern for his own children brought home the awareness that Lelonis might be abusing others.

Based upon the meeting with the victim and a separate telephone call with him, the Diocese found that his "*allegations were consistent in detail.*"

The Diocese advised Lelonis of the complaint in January, 1995 and he was thereafter sent to St. Luke Institute for evaluation and treatment. The Diocese provided St. Luke's with a summary of the meeting with Lelonis which included the following:

- According to Lelonis, "*he always feared that something like this would happen.*"
- Lelonis "*may have given*" the victim alcohol, but "*did not specifically recall.*"
- Lelonis advised that he found adolescents attractive, that his earlier behavior as a priest would probably be viewed as "*imprudent by today's standards,*" and that he was "*naïve, wide-eyed and open in his expression of affection.*"
- When asked to provide further details, Lelonis responded that there were times when young people spent the night, but it was always in groups. He then advised that although he "*wanted to be honest,*" he was not sure "*how much of his dirty laundry he was obliged to share.*"
- Lelonis advised that "*I am not attracted to young children. I do find adolescents attractive but it's not like I can't control it or it's a problem.*"

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St. Luke's then recommended that Lelonis be returned to active ministry. Bishop Donald Wuerl and Father David Zubik referred to Lelonis' time at St. Luke's as being due to "*health reasons*" or "*personal reasons.*"

Wuerl thereafter sent a letter to Lelonis on August 10, 1995 wherein he welcomed him back "*following your leave of absence for personal reasons.*" Wuerl further advised, "*I share with you my joy at your return to full-time ministry.*"

File documents revealed that from July, 1996 to September, 1996, the Diocese paid for counseling sessions for the victim.

On January 6, 2002 an article detailing the Catholic Church's practice of reassigning priests accused of sexual abuse of children was published in the Boston Globe. Wuerl sent Lelonis a letter dated February 22, 2002 advising him that his ministerial faculties were restricted to St. Francis Motherhouse and that he was no longer permitted to function as a priest without permission. A memorandum in the file dated February 25, 2002 documented a conversation between Wuerl and Father Kudrick wherein Wuerl "*in confidence*" explained to Kudrick that it had become necessary for him to restrict Lelonis' faculties. The memorandum revealed that Kudrick advised Wuerl that "*he would keep it confidential.*"

On April 22, 2002, the victim notified the Diocese again about his abuse and advised that he was seeking compensation. In a letter to the victim dated July 16, 2002, the Diocese advised him that his allegation was never fully substantiated and it had been denied by Lelonis. The Diocese further advised that because there was no clear resolution, "*the priest in question is asking to appear before the Ministerial Assessment Board for a review of this allegation.*" The victim was invited to appear before the Board to tell his story.

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On July 31, 2002, Lelonis sent a letter to Father James Young, Vicar for Clergy, advising him that the “*enclosed confidential information comes by way of a friend in law enforcement.*” Among other things, Lelonis provided the victim’s current address and date of birth and requested that the Diocese re-send the letter to him (as it had been returned as undeliverable). That way, it could be demonstrated that he had been given an opportunity to appear before the Board. Lelonis then provided details of the victim’s criminal history in order to show that he was not a “*credible accuser.*”

Following a meeting of the Diocesan Review Board, the Board concluded that it could not determine “*with certainty*” the credibility of the victim’s claim. The Board recommended that Lelonis be allowed to continue in “*non-parochial ministry*” without access to children, in spite of his admission to the Board of his “*attraction to minors.*” Included with the supporting documents for the Board’s recommendation was a four-page letter by Lelonis denying any sexual abuse and requesting a return to ministry.

On August 14, 2002, the Diocese notified the Allegheny County District Attorney’s Office of “*inappropriate sexual contact that occurred sometime between 1972-75 when [the victim] was a minor of age 12-15.*”

In a letter dated November 4, 2002, the Diocese advised the victim that Wuerl had accepted the Board’s recommendation that Lelonis be given a “*limited non-parish assignment.*” It should be noted that in a November, 2002 Clergy Personnel Allegation Summary Report that was completed by Diocesan personnel, it was documented that the complaint against Lelonis was both internally consistent and consistent with known facts.

On July 14, 2014, Father Lawrence DiNardo, Episcopal Vicar for Canonical Services, sent a letter to Lelonis granting him 17 faculties in his role as Canonical Consultant to the Office of the Tribunal. These faculties included the authorization of marriages and the judging of the appropriateness of Christian burial in doubtful cases.

On July 29, 2014, Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance was granted to Lelonis certifying that no record existed in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare’s statewide central registry listing Lelonis as a perpetrator of an indicated or founded report of child abuse.

As of 2017, Lelonis was listed on the Diocese’s website as an active priest, holding the title of Director of Matrimonial Concerns/Tribunal Judge.