

# Reverend Lawrence O'Connell

## Biographical Information

|                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| YEAR OF BIRTH: | 1906          |
| YEAR OF DEATH: | 1986          |
| ORDINATION:    | June 15, 1930 |

## Employment/Assignment History

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 7/03/1930-7/21/1948  | Parochial Vicar, Annunciation, North Side, PA   |
| 1/04/1940-7/23/1941  | Administrator, Annunciation, North Side, PA     |
| 3/10/1946-3/27/1946  | Vicar ENC, Annunciations, North Side, PA        |
| 7/22/1948-10/16/1948 | Vicar ENC PRO TEM, Master Dolorosa, Chicora, PA |
| 10/16/1948-6/25/1952 | Pastor, Master Dolorosa, Chicora, PA            |
| 6/26/1952-6/28/1983  | Pastor, St. Gabriel, Whitehall, PA              |
| 6/29/1983            | Resigned  |

## Summary

On January 7, 2004, an adult female alleged that Father Lawrence O'Connell sexually abused her on numerous occasions when she was approximately 11 to 13 years of age. She stated that she and a friend worked in the rectory at St. Gabriel on Mondays, counting the loose change from the Sunday services. She stated that, inevitably, O'Connell would ask her to stay behind and then invite her into his office where he would touch her inappropriately, french-kiss her and have her perform oral sex on him. She reported that the abuse occurred once a week for over a year. O'Connell told her; "*You are special and this is our special time together.*" He also told her not to tell anyone about their secret because otherwise it would not be special anymore. Additionally, he told her he loved her.

The female further related that O'Connell took her and her friends out for lunch or to a movie and bought gifts for them. She stated that she remembers the feeling of dread that she had on Sunday nights knowing that she would be subjected to the sexual abuse the next day. Although she told her parents about the abuse many years later, they did not pursue the subject.

The Allegheny County District Attorney's Office was notified of the allegation.

On April 28, 2004, a local reporter for KDKA TV contacted Father Lengwin to advise that she had heard there were sexual allegations against O'Connell. The reporter noted that she and her family had been members of his parish and that she had attended school at St. Gabriel. She then reported that she and three other girls worked at the rectory and that O'Connell would occasionally call them into another room where he would kiss them; "*place his tongue down your throat, fondle you and make overtures.*" He also bought them gifts. The reporter noted that although she had "*no desire to make a case,*" it was something that she would never forget.

## Summary

In a memorandum to the file dated April 28, 2004, it was documented that the Diocese of Pittsburgh contacted the reporter and invited her to talk about the allegation that she had made involving O'Connell. The reporter responded that she did not feel that coming in to talk was something that she would like to do. She stated that the reason she had called Lengwin was to add credibility to the allegation that she had become aware of during her morning staff meeting at KDKA. She stated that she was not currently interested in counseling and that she did not want her allegation to go any further due to her public position. She then reiterated the nature of the abuse that occurred in O'Connell's office. She stated that when she told her mother shortly after it occurred, her mother told her that she needed to focus more on her schoolwork and that she really did not have time to work at the rectory anymore. The other girl quit around the same time. The reporter noted that O'Connell would often buy gifts for the girls or take them to dinner at the Lamont.

On April 29, 2004, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published an article reporting that a lawsuit had been filed against the Diocese for ignoring and concealing the sexual abuse of six people by priests dating back to 1954. The article stated:

*The suit claims the church was negligent, acted in concert to conceal incidence of sexual abuse, misrepresented the status of the various priests, violated the statute by not publicly acknowledging incidents, did not care for and provide safe environments for children, did not protect children against risks of abuse, did not warn anyone of repeat offenders, and did not properly supervise the priests.*

The article continuing, stating that “[t]he suit further claims church officials were incompetent in allowing the abuse, that their negligence caused emotional distress, and that the plaintiffs were harmed because of official inaction.”

The article reported that O'Connell was named in the lawsuit by an adult female who stated that when she was 12 years old, O'Connell had her perform sex acts with him. She explained that the abuse started with kissing and fondling, while two other girls watched. It ended three years later when O'Connell hired a new girl to work with him at St. Gabriel.

In a letter dated June 29, 2004, the Diocese provided the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office with a list of the most recent allegations of abuse received. O'Connell's name was on the list. It was noted that a female known as Jane Doe 1, who wished to remain anonymous, was abused by O'Connell at St. Gabriel when she was between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age.

On July 1, 2004 the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review both published articles reporting that six more lawsuits were filed against the Diocese. O'Connell was named as one of the abusers. The article stated that two women reported that O'Connell often fondled them as they arrived for class at St. Gabriel. They were seven and 14 years of age, respectively, when this occurred. The lawsuit named the Diocese, Bishop Donald Wuerl and Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua as the defendants.

## **Summary**

In a September 30, 2004 article printed in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, it was reported that eight more lawsuits were filed against the Diocese in connection with sexual abuse allegations. O'Connell was once again named in the lawsuit. The plaintiffs asked the court to hold church leaders, Wuerl and Bevilacqua responsible for allowing the alleged assaults to occur.

In Diocesan memorandums from May 2008, it was noted that one of the victims was seeking counseling through the church. There was also a payment agreement signed by the victim along with a check issued to her by the Diocese for counseling.