

The Case of Father Ernest Paone

Known Assignments

06/1957 - 12/1960	St. Titus, Aliquippa
12/1960 - 05/1961	Epiphany, Uptown
05/1961 - 10/1961	Mother of Sorrows, McKees Rocks
10/1961 - 05/1962	St. Monica, Wampum/ St. Theresa, Koppel
05/1962 - 05/1966	Madonna of Jerusalem, Sharpsburg
05/1966 - 02/2001	Leave of Absence/ Health Reasons
09/1966 - 02/2001	Ministry in Los Angeles & San Diego, California and Las Vegas, Nevada
02/19/2001	Retired from Active Ministry

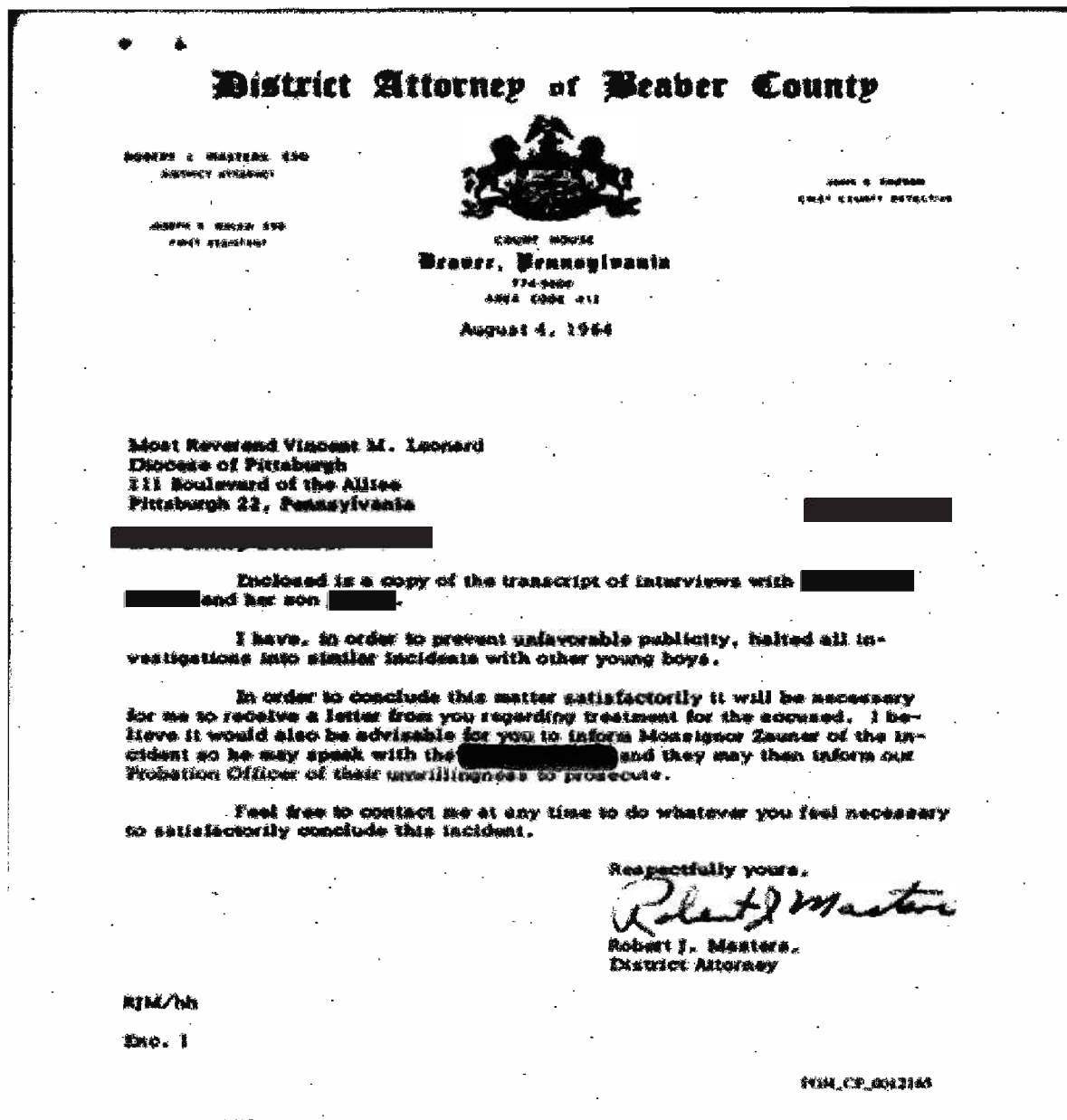
Father Ernest Paone was ordained in 1957 and was assigned to five separate parishes within the first nine years of his ministry.

On May 1, 1962, Father Edmund Sheedy, the Pastor of St. Monica where Paone was serving as Parochial Vicar, notified Bishop John Wright that he had interceded to prevent Paone from being arrested for “molesting young boys of the parish and the illegal use of guns with even younger parishioners.” Sheedy advised Wright that Paone was involved in “conduct degrading to the priesthood” and “scandalous to the parishioners.” In response, the Diocese reassigned Paone to Madonna of Jerusalem, in Sharpsburg.

On August 4, 1964, Robert Masters, the District Attorney of Beaver County, sent a letter to Bishop Vincent Leonard of the Diocese of Pittsburgh with respect to a sexual abuse investigation of Paone. The District Attorney advised the Diocese that “in order to prevent unfavorable publicity,” he had “halted all investigations into similar incidents involving young boys.” No further action was taken against Paone.

On September 15, 2017, Masters testified before the Grand Jury. Masters was confronted with his letter which the Grand Jury obtained from Diocesan files. When asked by the attorney for the Commonwealth why he would defer to the Bishop on a criminal matter, Master replied,

“Probably respect for the Bishop. I really have no proper answer.” Masters also admitted he was desirous of support from the Diocese for his political career.



The District Attorney's Letter to Bishop Leonard

For approximately one year, Paone was without a clear assignment within the Diocese. On May 20, 1966, Wright granted Paone an indefinite leave of absence “for reasons bound up with your psychological and physical health as well as spiritual well-being.” Following this leave of absence, Paone relocated to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. In 1967, he relocated again to the Diocese of San Diego.

Paone’s home Diocese remained the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The ability to remove Paone from ministry or permit him to continue in ministry resided in the Bishop of Pittsburgh. In the subsequent years, Paone would require continued authorization from the Diocese of Pittsburgh to remain in active ministry among the Catholic faithful and their children. This was demonstrated in documents obtained by the Grand Jury from the secret or confidential archives of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

On August 14, 1968, Paone requested that the Diocese recommend him for faculties within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Paone indicated that he had spoken with Wright and had obtained his approval. On August 27, 1968, the Diocese complied with this request by letter. Father Anthony Bosco, Chancellor of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, wrote Monsignor Benjamin Hawkes of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and informed him that Paone was living in California with the knowledge and approval of Wright. Bosco stated, “There would, therefore, be no objection to Father being granted the faculties of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.”


3630-29 Vista Campana S.
Oceanside, Ca. 92054
August 14, 1968

Dear Father:

In order to satisfy certain requirements of the Los Angeles Chancery regarding occasional Sunday "helpouts", I have been directed to obtain a letter from you which indicates that 1) you are aware that I am residing here with my brother, and 2) that you recommend me for the faculties of this Archdiocese. During our several meetings, Bishop Wright indicated to me that he approves of both points and had offered to arrange a meeting between Cardinal McIntyre and myself. At the time, I mentioned that I felt that such a meeting would not be necessary. I would appreciate it if you would send the letter to me personally or to Monsignor Benjamin G. Hawkes --1530 West Ninth Street--Los Angeles 90015 California.

Thanking you in advance for your kind cooperation and with every good wish, I am,

Sincerely,



Father E. Paone

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Paone Requests a Letter of Good Standing

August 27, 1968

Dear Monsignor Hawkes:

Father Ernest Paone has written this office with a request that I inform you of his status with the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Father Paone is on a legitimate leave of absence from the Diocese of Pittsburgh and is residing in California with the knowledge and approval of Bishop Wright. There would, therefore, be no objections to Father being granted the faculties of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

With every best wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

(Rt. Rev. Msgr.) Anthony G. Bosco
Chancellor

Rt. Rev. Msgr. Benjamin G. Hawkes
1530 West Ninth Street
Los Angeles, California 90015

mjb

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Again in 1975, a similar request was made for a letter of good standing. On March 3, 1975, the Diocese complied. Bosco provided a letter “to certify that the Reverend Ernest C. Paone is a priest of the Diocese of Pittsburgh on leave of absence, but in good standing. He has permission of his Ordinary to offer Mass.”

During the decades between Paone’s departure from Pennsylvania in 1966 and 1991, Paone served as pastor of a parish in Diamond Bar, California.⁵ Paone reported to the Diocese that his service included hearing “many confessions in that parish.” Paone also served in two parishes in the Diocese of San Diego. Paone taught in public schools, and attended at least one course at Catholic University in San Diego, while maintaining all priestly faculties through the Diocese of Pittsburgh. There is no indication that the Diocese provided any interested parties information that Paone had sexually abused children or that the Diocese had played a role in preventing his prosecution for that conduct.

⁵ Diocesan records note that during this time Paone was “supplying assistance on Sundays and Holy Days in a parish for 21 years.”

March 3, 1975

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that the Reverend Ernest C. Paone is a priest of the Diocese of Pittsburgh on leave of absence, but in good standing. He has the permission of his Ordinary to offer Mass.

With every best wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Most Reverend Anthony G. Bosco
Vicar General - Chancellor
Auxiliary Bishop of Pittsburgh

lac

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Another Letter of Good Standing From the Diocese

As Paone continued in ministry, he did so with approval from the Diocese in spite of the Diocese's knowledge that Paone was a child molester. The aforementioned period of time encompassed the entire tenure of Bishop Anthony Bevilacqua from October 1983 to February 1988. Diocesan records, obtained by the Grand Jury, show the least amount of internal correspondence regarding Paone during that time. The Grand Jury concluded that Bevilacqua left Paone to his ministries and provided little to no oversight. While the lack of meaningful supervision is consistent with the conduct of other Bishops of Pittsburgh and detailed herein, a relevant observation specific to Bevilacqua himself is the apparent lack of documentation of any of Paone's activities in contrast to the internal documentation executed by the other Bishops.

On June 30, 1989, Bishop Donald Wuerl sent a letter to the Vatican with respect to several diocesan priests who had recently been accused of sexually abusing children and whose cases had generated significant publicity. In the letter, Wuerl documented his diocesan policies for sexual abuse and stated his responsibility as Bishop was to determine the course of action in these cases. Wuerl wrote that Catholic parishioners had a right to know whether a priest accused of such crimes had been reassigned to their parish. Further, Wuerl advised that due to the scandal caused by these priests, he initiated a review of any previous cases of diocesan priests who had been accused of "pedophilic activities" with minors.

Wuerl warned the Vatican that Catholic bishops and dioceses could become liable once they are made aware of sexual abuse complaints and that priests who deny the "crime" of pedophilic activity with minors is "common in pedophiles" and that pedophilia is "incurable." Wuerl noted his exclusive role and stated that the "unassignability" of a priest must rest solely with the bishop due to the potential victims' parents "who have a moral right to expect chaste

conduct from the priest” and the parishioners who “would be gravely unsettled and scandalized in the knowledge that a priest pedophile has been assigned in their midst.”

However, despite Wuerl’s summary of the serious and criminal nature of the problem to the Vatican, Diocesan records revealed that Wuerl granted Paone’s request to be reassigned again on October 22, 1991. This time, Paone was permitted to transfer to the Diocese of Reno – Las Vegas to serve as the Parochial Vicar at a local parish. Wuerl wrote that he had been updated on Paone’s recent meeting with Father Robert Guay, Secretary for Clergy and Pastoral Life, and Father David Zubik, Director of the Office of Clergy. Wuerl noted that Paone has most recently served on a high school faculty in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Wuerl’s continued approval permitted Paone to enjoy all the faculties of the Diocese. On November 20, 1991, Zubik wrote to Paone to confirm that Wuerl had approved his new assignment.



COPY

DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

111 BOULEVARD OF ALLIES
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15222-1698
(412) 456-3010
FAX: (412) 456-3185

September 6, 1991

Dear Father Paone:

Your letter of August 16, 1991 arrived and with it your request for permission to exercise priestly ministry in the Diocese of Reno, Nevada. For the past twenty-five years, you have been offering priestly service to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles with the permission granted you at that time by Bishop John J. Wright. I am grateful for your sharing this request with me.

To assure that every consideration is given to your request, I have given your letter to the Priest Personnel Board for our review at a future meeting. After I have received the observations and recommendations from the Board, I will be in a better position to respond to you.

Grateful for your ministry and with every best wish, I am

Faithfully in Christ,

Bishop of Pittsburgh

Reverend Ernest C. Paone
Faculty - Oceanside, CA
234 Vista Montana Way
Ocean Side, CA 92054

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Bishop Wuerl Receives Paone's Request to Transfer

In March, 1992, Paone took a leave of absence from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for “reasons of health.” On July 25, 1994, the Diocese of Pittsburgh received another complaint of child sexual abuse committed by Paone in the 1960’s. The victim’s sister came forward and reported that after becoming aware of the abuse, her father “went to the rectory with a shotgun and told Father Paone that he better leave town.” The Diocese sent him to St. Luke’s Institute for an evaluation.

In a confidential letter sent to St. Luke’s, the Diocese acknowledged that Paone had been teaching seventh and eighth grade students in the Diocese of San Diego for 19 years. Further, in another confidential memorandum sent from Zubik to Wuerl, Paone’s various assignments and sexual abuse complaints were again listed in detail. The Grand Jury noted that this process showed no concern for public safety or the victims of child sexual abuse. The handling of these matters was commonplace. In spite of the complaint, Paone continued in active ministry following his brief evaluation at a church-based treatment facility.

The Grand Jury discovered that this 1994 complaint resulted in the generation of Diocesan records that noted an even greater extent of knowledge regarding Paone’s sexual conduct with children. An August 5, 1994 confidential memorandum sent from Zubik to Wuerl advised him of this new complaint against Paone and that due to this complaint, his file was reviewed “with great care.” Among other things, Zubik advised Wuerl that questions about Paone’s emotional and physical health were raised as early as the 1950’s, while he was still in seminary. Zubik further advised of Paone’s various assignments and correspondence over the years, before also describing the multiple records documenting the Diocese’s knowledge of his sexual abuse of children as early as 1962. Zubik then noted that with respect to these latter records, “You should know that these last three pieces of correspondence were placed in the confidential files.”

Wuerl responded by dispatching letters notifying the relevant California and Nevada Dioceses of the 1994 complaint. However, Wuerl did not report the more detailed information contained within Diocesan records. The Diocese did not recall Paone; nor did it suspend his faculties as a priest. To the contrary, Paone continued to have the support of the Diocese. On July 29, 1996, Wuerl was informed by the Chancellor of the Diocese of San Diego that Paone had continued with his ministry, but, “acting on the advice of our insurance carrier,” he was requesting that Wuerl complete the enclosed affidavit, which stated, among other things, that Paone has “not had any problems involving sexual abuse, any history of sexual involvement with minors or others, or any other inappropriate sexual behavior.”



Office of the Chancellor

July 25, 1996

JUL 29 1996

BISHOP'S OFFICE

Most Rev. Donald W. Wuerl
111 Boulevard of the Allies
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Your Excellency:

Father Ernest Pearce, a priest of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, is providing priestly ministry in the Diocese of San Diego at this time. Acting on the advice of our insurance carrier, we are reviewing our personnel files of diocesan and religious order priests working in our diocese and seeking the information requested on the enclosed affidavit. This request is in no way meant to indicate that there has been in the past, or exists in the present, any reason to question the behavior of Father Ernest Pearce.

I would be grateful if you would complete the form and return it to this office at your convenience.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Msgr. Daniel J. Dillsbough, STD, JCL
Chancellor

DJD:rs
Enclosure

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On August 12, 1996, Wuerl directed Father Kozar, Secretary for Clergy and Religious, to respond to the request. Kozar then sent a confidential letter to the Diocese of San Diego and advised, among other things, that:

Father Paone has not had an assignment in this diocese for over thirty years. Thus, the only appropriate information about him has already been communicated to you in a letter from Father Robert Guay, Secretary for Clergy and Religious, dated January 30, 1996.

Paone again continued in ministry.

On January 6, 2002, an article which detailed the Catholic Church's practice of reassigning priests accused of sexual abuse of children was published in the *Boston Globe* newspaper. In response, a letter was dispatched in May 2002, by Father James Young, Episcopal Vicar for Clergy and Religious, to Father Michael Murphy of the Diocese of San Diego, advising him that due to the "recent difficulties in the Church and having raised the bar on allegations brought against our priests," the Diocese of Pittsburgh was removing the faculties of Paone and placing him on administrative leave. The Grand Jury noted that only this external force generated the action which should have occurred decades earlier.

In June, 2002, another victim advised the Diocese of Pittsburgh that he was sexually abused by Paone in the 1960's. The abuse included fondling, oral sex, and anal sex. It occurred at the victim's house, at a hunting camp to which Paone had access to in the woods, and, in Paone's car. Paone also provided the victim with alcohol, pornographic magazines, and cash. In July, the Diocese notified Paone about this new complaint. Then, on July 9, 2002, the Diocese of Pittsburgh notified the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office of "inappropriate touching that occurred around 1962-63 when the alleged victim was age 15. Incidents occurred in a cabin owned by Father Paone but alleged victim does not know where it was located." It does not appear any information

regarding Paone's history was provided to the District Attorney and this notice was sent long after the statute of limitations had expired.

In February, 2003, Wuerl accepted Paone's resignation from ministry. Wuerl wrote a letter acknowledging Paone's request while providing assurance that "sustenance needs and benefits will continue according to the norms of law." Approximately 41 years after the Diocese learned that Paone was sexually assaulting children, he was finally retired from active ministry. In spite of Wuerl's statements to the Vatican, the clear and present threat that Paone posed to children was hidden and kept secret from parishioners in three states. Wuerl's statements had been meaningless without any action.

Three years after Paone's retirement, the Diocese received an update. A February 2006 confidential memorandum from Father John Rushofsky, Clergy Personnel, was obtained by the Grand Jury and revealed that Paone had been "assisting with confessions for confirmation-age children, apparently asking inappropriate questions of the young penitents." When questioned about this, Paone told local Diocesan officials that he had received permission from the Diocese. The Diocese dispatched a letter to Paone to remind him that his faculties had been revoked.

On May 10, 2012, Paone died.