

The Case of Father Richard Zula

Known Assignments

06/1966 – 06/1971	St. Cyril of Alexandria, North Side, Pittsburgh
06/1971 - 12/1973	Most Blessed Sacrament, Natrona Heights
12/1973 - 06/1980	Our Lady of Czestochowa, New Castle
06/1980 - 05/1984	St. Michael Archangel, Munhall
05/1984 - 06/1986	Sisters of St. Mary & Ann, Marianna
06/1986 - 09/1987	St. Clement, Tarentum (Resigned)
09/1987	Leave of Absence (Withdrawn); Zula is admitted to the Institute of Living, Hartford, Connecticut
04/1996	Withdrawn from Ministry

Father Richard Zula was ordained in 1966 and assigned to six different parishes through 1987. In 1987, the Diocese was under the command of Bishop Anthony Bevilacqua. In September of that year, the Diocese received a complaint that Zula had engaged in violent sexual activity with a minor at a rectory. This conduct involved three other adult males who were not priests.

On September 25, 1987, a meeting was held between Zula, Father Ted Rutkowski, Secretary for Clergy and Pastoral Life, and Father Robert Guay. Documentation of the meeting consisted of handwritten notes that included the name of the child victim at the top of the page, followed by three additional names and another notation of the victim's name. Among other things, this document listed "parties at Marianna rectory (assigned May 1984)⁸" "alcohol, marijuana;" "oral sex, attempt anal sex, whips, rectory bedroom, offer to pay private room fee at St. V., present activity." This was followed by the notation, "Institute of Living Tues Sept 29" and the following notes: "No public celebration of mass, No return to parish once out, No communication with [victim] or family, No communication with others involved, Resignation

⁸ 1987 was the year when Zula became pastor at St. Clement.

from parish." Zula was subsequently sent to the Institute of Living, in Hartford, Connecticut on September 29, 1987.

Receiving
by U.S. Post Office
9/25/87

9-25-87
Zula - Gray
TR

[REDACTED]

- parties at Maryanna rectory (assigned May 1984)
- alcohol, marijuana

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- oral sex attempt and sex
- whips
- rectory bedroom
- offer to pay private room fee at St J
- present activity

St Paul Retreat House
Institute of Living Tues Sept 29

- No public celebration of Mass
- No return to parish one out
- No communication with Douglas or family
- No communication with others involved
- Resignation from parish

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The Handwritten Notes

On December 9, 1987, Rutkowski documented his thoughts that Zula was a “mama’s boy” who was “pursued” by the victim. He also described the victim as being “16 – 17 years of age.”

A confidential memorandum from Father Farmer to Rutkowski dated December 29, 1987, outlined three proposed scenarios for placing Zula back into ministry. Among other things, these proposals included assigning him as Chaplain at various parishes or assigning him to provide pastoral care at nursing homes.

Zula was discharged on January 13, 1988. The Diocese was advised that Zula again confessed his criminal conduct. He stated, “I got involved in some inappropriate sexual behavior and my bishop has sent me here for an evaluation.” The summary further noted this other “individual” was “very sexually promiscuous and needy.” The Grand Jury’s review of these materials compels the conclusion that the Diocese was prepared to return yet another admitted child molester to ministry. Indeed, notes in Zula’s personnel file indicated that “re Zula” the “sooner reassigned the better.” However, intervening and external factors changed that judgment.

361-2121

Stanko 2-10-88 (re Zula)

- former resigned the better
- sitting around doing nothing not helping
- will see Zula periodically. Doesn't need regular sessions
- I told Stanko we are still awaiting written summary from
Institute of Living

Planning Zula's Return to Ministry

In May, 1988, a summary of facts was prepared in connection with a lawsuit filed on behalf of victim against the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Among other things, the summary documented the victim's abuse, and the abuse of the victim's brother, by Fr. Robert Wolk. However, the summary also stated that at some point Wolk himself had criticized Zula for "having wild parties with drugs and alcohol."

By September 1988, a criminal investigation was underway. On September 22, 1988, the Pennsylvania State Police interviewed the victim who, among other things, reported that he was first sexually abused by Wolk in 1981. Zula then began sexually assaulting him in 1984 at which time the victim was still under the age of 16. The victim further advised that the sexual abuse occurred approximately once a week for another three years and that it included oral sex, sado-masochistic behavior, and attempts at anal sex. On November 10, 1988, an arrest warrant was issued for Zula. There is no indication that the Diocese disclosed their prior knowledge of Zula's conduct or Zula's confession to the police or to the public.

Zula was charged with over 130 counts related to child sexual abuse. His arrest generated significant press coverage. In the midst of the public outcry, Charles P. Nemeth, Esquire wrote a letter to the editor of the Pittsburgh Catholic magazine dated October 20, 1988. A copy of this letter was found within the Diocesan records. Among other things, Nemeth advised that he was a practicing Catholic and has been a criminal defense attorney for 10 years, which included representing sex offenders. Further, Nemeth advised that he held an LLM degree in Law Psychiatry and Criminology from Georgetown University. Nemeth then advised that he was "awe-struck by how reticent church officials are to condemn this activity as being criminal in scope and form." He criticized the "academic ponderings" and "other esoteric psychiatric diagnoses" that characterized child sexual abuse as "deviance and social aberration" and added that "in fact, it is

probably one of the more heinous criminal activities that individuals can ever engage in. The reasons are self-evident.” He then stated some of these reasons, which included the “higher standard of conduct” that should be required of priests; the “pedestal” on which priests are placed; that “sexual molestation between adults and minors is one of the most reprehensible forms of conduct outlined in statutory and codified law;” and that to “equate the social diseases of alcoholism and drug dependency with child molestation is an absolute and unadulterated folly.”

In November 1988, personnel from the Diocese, including its attorney, met with the Western Regional Office of Children, Youth, and Families (“WROCYF”). A summary of the meeting was then provided to Wuerl in an April 24, 1989 letter from the WROCYF. Among other things, Wuerl was reminded that the Diocese was considered to be a “mandated reporter” of child abuse and thereby required to report any suspected cases of which it became aware. Further, Wuerl was notified that the Diocese was prohibited from conducting its own internal investigations to decide whether or not to report the abuse and was required to report it immediately. The letters exchanged between the WROCYF and the Bishop illustrated a disagreement as to whether the law’s mandates applied to Diocesan personnel.

In the midst of this public scandal, on March 1, 1989, Wuerl authorized a confidential settlement between the Diocese and the family of the victim and his brother (who was also a victim) in the amount of a \$500,000 lump sum with a separate amount of \$400,000 to be paid over a period of 30 years. The settlement contained a “confidentiality agreement” which prohibited the victims from discussing the settlement or basis for the settlement with any third parties - unless agreed to by the Diocese. The settlement released the Bishop, the Diocese, and the Roman Catholic Church from any further liability with respect to the matter.

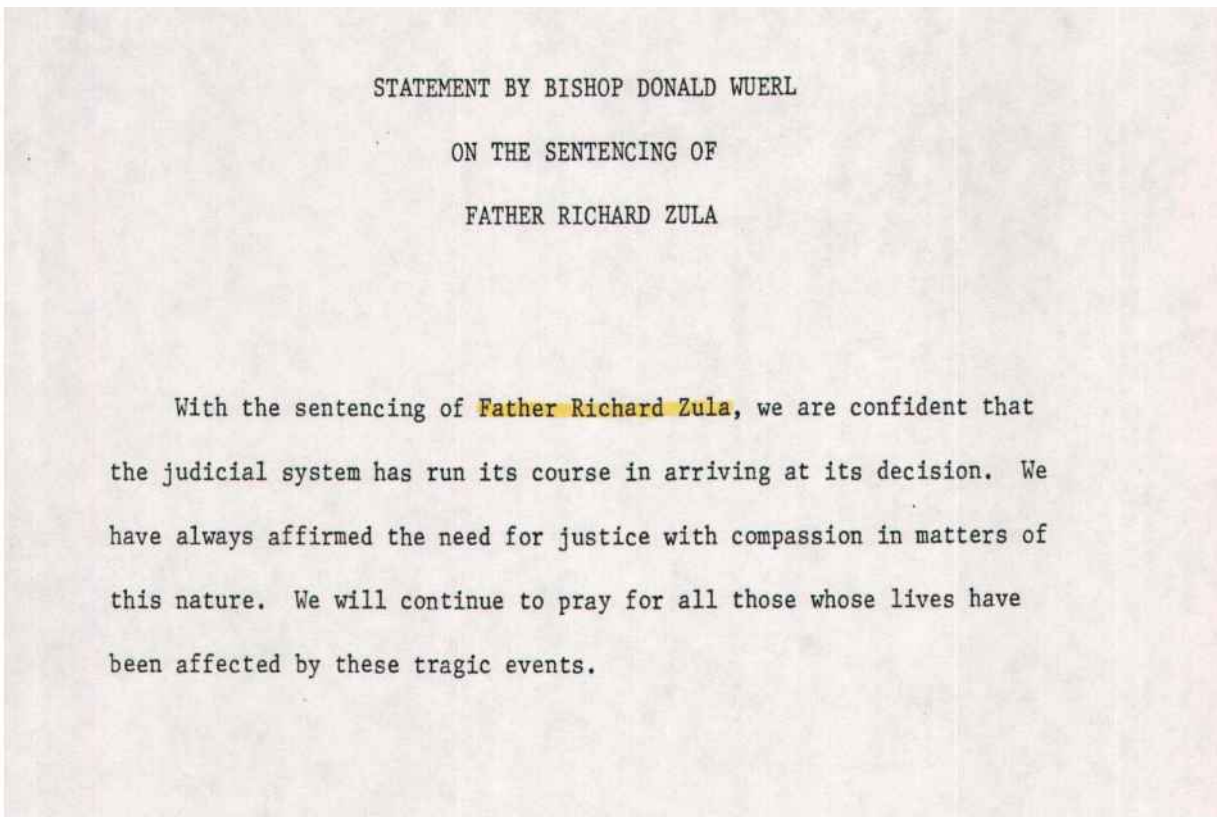
By the fall of 1989, Zula had entered a guilty plea to two counts and was awaiting sentencing. At that time, the Diocese began to receive additional complaints of child sexual abuse against Zula. Father Ron Lengwin documented a telephone call that he received from a parishioner on August 25, 1989. The caller advised that Zula had made frequent sexual advances on her son and at least two of his friends when they were 13-year-old altar boys. The mother reported that Zula asked the boys to pose like statues and attempted to tie them up using rope. The Grand Jury found this mother's report to be consistent with the testimony of George. However, there was no indication that the Diocese reported this complaint to law enforcement. In fact, the Diocese was utilizing diocesan resources and personnel to advocate for Zula at his upcoming sentencing proceeding.

On October 23, 1989, Kenneth Stanko, a doctor obtained by the Diocese to work with Zula, wrote a letter to Father Rutkowski. Stanko enclosed a copy of his evaluation of Zula which he conducted for presentation at Zula's sentencing. Stanko advised that this evaluation was also sent to the court. Among other things, Stanko opined that Zula's "personality style is one of being passive-dependent and that he would not likely be a person to initiate sexual activity." By this letter, the Diocese was placed on notice that the services it had procured for Zula were being used as mitigation evidence at Zula's sentencing. Moreover, these assertions blamed the child victim rather than the adult criminal.

Stanko wrote that Zula had admitted to "mutual masturbation and fellatio with one sixteen-year male" but only because "the boy first suggested sexual behaviors." Stanko further noted that Zula had also admitted to "mild sado-masochistic" behaviors with several boys. However, Stanko concluded that Zula "has never exhibited psychotic symptoms or any disturbance to his thinking and reasoning. I have never doubted his sincerity or honesty." The Grand Jury notes that while

Diocesan resources were being used in such a fashion, unknowing parishioners were still actively tithing from their income without knowledge that church funds were being used to mitigate a convicted sex offender's sentence.

In preparation for Zula's sentencing, a press release issued by Wuerl stated, in part, ". . . the judicial system has run its course in arriving at its decision."



The Bishop's Public Statement

In 1990, after Zula was sentenced to state prison, the Diocese agreed to set aside \$500.00 per month until his release, at which time he would be paid the full amount in a lump sum. The Diocese also informed Zula that he would not be given any new assignments and asked him to consider requesting a dispensation from the priestly ministry. Zula responded in a letter dated

September 11, 1990. He wrote that had the Diocese supported him, he may not have pleaded guilty. He then accused the Diocese of paying for his treatment in order to “save their own hide.” Zula further advised that the District Attorney had offered to make a deal with him if he divulged names of other priests involved in pedophilia and that he

could have named several priests; however, out of a sense of loyalty to my brother priests, and to try to protect the Church from any further scandal, I would not divulge their names, even to save myself from a jail term.

Zula stated he would sign the petition for dispensation if the Diocese arranged for his release from prison first.

In March, 1992, Zula informed the Diocese that he might be eligible for early release in July and requested that Wuerl confirm his future salary payments to assist him in obtaining his release. In response to Zula’s request, internal Diocesan documents revealed that Wuerl directed his subordinates to provide the requested information. The Diocese also agreed to increase Zula’s sustenance payments to \$750 per month after his release and to provide him with medical coverage. When Zula was released in July, 1992, he received a check in the amount of \$11,542.68 from the Diocese.

Glory to
Jesus Christ!

MARCH 4, 1992

DEAR BISHOP WUERL: -

How ARE YOU? I HOPE FINE! - I JUST WANTED TO GIVE YOU AN UPDATE ON WHAT'S GOING ON. I WAS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT A "HOME-PLAN" AND A "JOB PLAN" TO THE PA. PAROLE BOARD ON MARCH 3, 1992. THEY WANTED TO KNOW WHAT INCOME I WOULD RECEIVE UPON RELEASE, AND WHO WAS MY EMPLOYER.

I INFORMED THEM THAT I WOULD RECEIVE \$750. SUPPL. SALARY/PENSION AND INSURANCE MEDICAL COVERAGE FROM THE "PGH. CATHOLIC DIOCESE".

BISHOP WUERL, IT IS EXACTLY FOUR MONTHS TO MY RELEASE DATE; JULY 4, 1992. THERE WILL BE FIREWORKS WHEN I GET OUT!

PLEASE REMEMBER ME IN YOUR PRAYERS DURING THIS SACRED LENTEN SEASON. I WISH YOU A VERY SPIRITUAL AND FRUITFUL LENT.

your Brother in Christ,
Rich Zula

* I HAVE ALSO WRITTEN TO
FR. GUAY.

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Zula's Letter to Wuerl Regarding Early Release from Prison

The Diocese continued to receive reports of past criminal conduct on the part of Zula after his release. In a 1993 letter to Wuerl, a victim reported that Zula “systematically ask[ed] me to strip, assume a kneeling position, have my hands tied by a closeline type rope and subject me to a beating with various types of whips and leather straps.” Shortly after this report, the Diocese finally began “laicization,” the process to remove Zula as a priest.

On January 20, 1995, Wuerl met with Zula to discuss his future salary and medical benefits. They discussed his dispensation from priestly vows but Zula was hesitant to agree to his removal because he did not think he could support himself. Zula suggested the possibility of a lump-sum payment which Wuerl referred to as “cushion income.” After further discussion, Wuerl was open to the idea of Zula receiving a lump-sum payment of \$180,000.00. Zula countered, however, with a request for “\$240,000.00 (TAX FREE).” Additional internal documents indicated that the Diocese weighed Zula’s request. Three pages of undated handwritten notes with the heading “FROM THE DESK OF Father Guay” referenced Zula’s concern regarding his July, 1995 payments and the figures of \$180,000 and \$240,000. The words “slush fund – under table” were also included on the notes. Similarly, in a November 24, 1995 letter sent from Zula to Wuerl, Zula stated that he had recently met with Guay and Father Dinardo who informed him that if he were to resign from the active priestly ministry, he would still be entitled to receive his monthly sustenance payments and medical coverage. In light of this representation, Zula stated his desire to resign.

In 1996, the Diocese entered into a memorandum of understanding with Zula whereby he was allowed to resign and was prohibited from ever seeking future assignments within the Diocese. In return, the Diocese agreed that it would continue to pay him \$750.00 per month for sustenance and provide medical coverage for him.

On January 31, 2001, another victim disclosed abuse by Zula. The victim reported that Zula asked him to remove his clothes so that he could beat him with a belt. On December 14, 2001, the Diocese increased Zula's sustenance payments to \$1,000 per month as of January, 2002.

In July, 2007 the Diocese learned that Zula had been volunteering at the Good Shepherd Church in Braddock. The Diocese dispatched a letter to Zula reminding him that such activity was not permitted.