

NEWS

The testimony of One Witness: A Rank-and-File Priest.

James Faluszczyk, himself a victim of abuse by a priest, and still feeling called to the priesthood, left active ministry because the Church ignored his claims.



Rome, Wednesday, February 20, 2019 – After a confluence of developmental vulnerabilities and grooming, I was abused by my childhood pastor Rev. Msgr. Daniel J. Martin from the time I was sixteen to nineteen. Having grown up around the neighborhood church, I felt close to God at church, and moving through adolescence felt closer to him when I was helping others. Out of the context of being an altar boy, student secretary in the church office, playing my guitar at mass, and volunteering in other ways at St. George's, I felt God calling me to be a priest. (I still believe that call is valid, although I choose not to live it publicly under the auspices of the Catholic Church for obvious reasons which follow.) I was around Martin when I was serving at church, and under the watchful eye of him and other priests assigned to the parish as I played with my friends in the neighborhood.

When I told Bishop Trautman (retired) of the Erie Diocese about my abuse he said I was lucky that it didn't happen to me more. Evidently, clergy sex abuse usually happens much more than the at least fifteen times it happened to me. Over the course of three years, when I took an allegation of child sex abuse to Bishop Persico of Erie, he ignored it and told me not to share my report and documentation with law enforcement, which had conducted an investigation parallel to one Persico had asked me to handle. Additionally, over the course of at least two years, when I repeatedly communicated an allegation of clergy sex abuse of a vulnerable adult seminarian by a, now seminary rector, Bishop Persico ignored my claim. The Rev. Joseph Gatto, currently on leave (for exhaustion?) as Rector of Christ the King Seminary, was allowed to remain in ministry—overseeing future priests—by Bishop Richard Malone of Buffalo, NY, with supposedly four years of knowledge of the allegation I brought forward to Persico.

On August 3, 2018, even before the release of the 40th PA Grand Jury Report, I was part of a Pennsylvania delegation which included Representative Mark Rozzi and former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham. In the context of our seeking an audience with Pope Francis I communicated to him the above allegations. We never heard back from him.

Three bishops and one Pope have ignored my claims. While Pope Francis has moved expeditiously on other types of issues with bishops, recently removing the Bishop of Memphis and putting an apostolic administrator on the spot the day of Bishop Martin Holley's ouster. If he is unwilling to apply a similar "administrative proceeding" to someone like Bishop Donald Trautman or Bishop Mark Bartchak or Bishop Richard Malone, then he himself—Pope Francis—the self-styled reformer, should resign.

I was a rank and file priest, a victim, and witness to clergy sexual abuse. After struggling with alcohol and substance abuse and the constant triggers around me, I left public ministry to become a whistleblower. The effects of my trauma have been, at times, debilitating.

My ministries as a priest seemed outwardly to be ordinary. I wasn't upwardly-mobile within the diocesan hierarchy, my assignments were a distance from the power-center of the diocese in Erie, and I mostly kept to myself within the local priestly fraternity. Most of my work was in education-related ministries in central Pennsylvania.

In my sworn testimony before the 40th Pennsylvania Grand Jury, I provided the names of 117 individuals who were either directly involved in the sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults, provided cover for such activities, or could speak to such as witnesses.

Among these 117 individuals:

- 83 are/were priests (Of these, only 7 appear to have no relevant awareness).
- 22 are/were diocesan officials.
- 5 are/were bishops.
- 10 have overseen diocesan priest personnel.
- 15 are/were seminary officials.
- 21 allegedly perpetrated abuse.
- 14 were named publicly for the first time in the GJ report after my testimony about them.
- 33 are/were priests who allegedly engage/d in extra-canonical sexual activity, potentially offering cover to criminal activity with minors and vulnerable adults
- 5 are/were members of law enforcement
- 6 are/were women religious representing four religious orders
- 14 are victims
- 1 priest abused me as a child.
- 2 priests attempted to abuse me as a child.
- 10 were complicit in the abuse I experienced, or otherwise groomed me for abuse.
- 69 can stand as corroborating witnesses.

Additionally, I provided testimony related to:

- 5 dioceses.
- 4 institutions of higher education.
- 4 seminaries.
- 4 canonical experts or societies.
- 3 still-redacted parties.
- 1 charitable foundation.
- Multiple facilities for the rehabilitation of priests.
- Multiple parishes, media figures and outlets, historians and experts on these matters.