The Case of Father Joseph M. Pease

Known Assignments

02/1961 — 10/1962	St. Joseph, Hanover
10/1962 — 08/1963	St. Peter Church, Mount Carmel
08/1963 — 05/1966	St. Patrick, York
05/1966	Diocesan Director of Vocations; Diocesan Director of Youth; St. Theresa, New Cumberland
05/1966 — 06/1971	St. Theresa, New Cumberland
05/1970	Temporarily assigned Our Lady of Lourdes, Enola
06/1971 — 11/1973	Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Mt. Carmel
11/1973 — 04/1978	St. John the Baptist, New Freedom
04/1978 — 06/1995	St. Joseph, Mechanicsburg
09/1995	Anodos Center, Downingtown
06/1995 — 12/2002	Divine Redeemer, Mt. Carmel
12/2002	Retires; admits to allegations

Father Joseph M. Pease was ordained on May 20, 1961. From 1961 through June 1995, Pease continued in ministry in various parishes throughout the Diocese of Harrisburg. At some point prior to May 16, 1995, the Diocese received a letter alleging Pease was a danger to the Church. The letter made accusations against Pease, another priest, and one former bishop. The writer interchanged the designations of "pedophile," "homosexual," and "transvestite" as part of a complaint that Dattilo had failed to "clean up" the Diocese from "sexual crimes." The letter concluded by addressing the allegations against the two priests, stating, "If you don't want more trouble on your hands along with old scandals and revelations, you better keep those 2 out. What I say is true, why don't you do some investigation before you act. You have done enough harm to the good people of the coal regions." The Grand Jury reviewed this letter as one of thousands of documents the Diocese of Harrisburg relinquished to the Grand Jury upon service of a subpoena for records related to child sexual abuse in September 2016.

[redacted]

Bishop Dattilo:

I taught high school in Mount Carmel for 30 years and lived in that community for almost 40 years before moving to Philadelphia. Recently, I returned to Mount Carmel for a visit and I saw the destruction of faith that your policies have done to the people.

To make matters worse you have assigned two priests who had been in Mount Carmel when I was there. [redacted] is a known pedophile and a transvestite. He was bailed out by Bishop [redacted] who was also a pedophile. Friends of mine in Harrisburg have told me that [redacted] was arrested also in Harrisburg. Don't you people keep records on these things?

Pease is a known homosexual, when he was in Mount Carmel, the boys in High school use to call him "the fairy-nice Father Pease."

What are you trying to do to the coal regions? I thought you were going to clean up the diocese from these sexual crimes, now you send these two in the same town.

If you don't want more trouble on your hands along with old scandals and revelations, you better keep those 2 out. What I say is true, why don't you do some investigation before you act. You have done enough harm to the good people of the coal regions.

[redacted] and concerned parents and grandparents of the region.

DOH0001630

The Letter of Complaint

On May 16, 1995, Helwig wrote a memorandum to Dattilo stating that he had reviewed the "private" files and found nothing on Pease. He indicated that the review was triggered by the above letter and that the accusations were damaging and disturbing. He noted, "She has lobbed a huge ball into our court which I don't think we can ignore. If we throw it back to her side of the net we may be able to find out if there is any substance to her allegations or if it is simply coming out of small town gossip and, for whatever reason, a vindictive or malicious spirit."

On June 27, 1995, a 36-year-old victim contacted Helwig at the direction of Father John Dorff. The man sought to report that Pease sexually abused him when Pease was Pastor at St. Paul's Church in Atlas, Pennsylvania. As a result, Helwig wrote another memorandum to Dattilo outlining the sexual abuse perpetrated by Pease. The victim reported that the sexual abuse occurred between 1971 and 1973, when the victim was between 13 and 15 years old. The victim stated Pease asked him, "Have you ever come yet?," placed his hand in the victim's pants, and began to fondle the victim's genitals. Pease took the victim's hand and placed it inside his pants, placing the victim's hand on his genitals. The victim stated that Pease co-owned a boat with Father Francis Bach. The boat was located in the Chesapeake Bay. While on this boat with the victim and some other boys, Pease performed oral sex on the child victim.

The victim explained that he was prompted to report at that time because he saw an article in The Catholic Witness that noted the names and pictures of the pastors of the new parishes. Until that moment, the victim had not realized that Pease was still in ministry. The victim wrote that he was concerned about his 12-year-old nephew who was, at the time, an altar server in the parish where Pease was assigned. Helwig wrote regarding the victim and stated, "He has felt some guilt over his cowardice at not being able to report these incidents to someone in authority, but he always hoped that someone else would come forward first."

The Diocese received more than one complaint about Pease. Pease had been in ministry since 1961. A thoughtful consideration of these facts, and a real concern for the welfare of children, should have resulted in a report to law enforcement, notice to Pease's past parishes, and a meaningful investigation into the existence of additional potential victims. Instead, the Diocese began plans to utilize a "treatment facility" to treat priests, such as Pease, who were accused of sexual abuse. These facilities were observed throughout the Grand Jury's investigation. Commonly used facilities were St. John Vianney Center in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, St. Luke's in Suitland, Maryland, and the Servants of the Paraclete in Jemez Springs, New Mexico. These entities relied almost entirely on the priests self-reporting their request for treatment. When a priest denied allegations of sexual abuse, he usually avoided any diagnosis related to the sexual abuse of children. Moreover, these institutions focused on a clinical diagnosis over actual behavior as reported by the victims. Put plainly, these institutions laundered accused priests, provided plausible deniability to the bishops, and permitted hundreds of known offenders to return to ministry.

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG – SECRETARIAT FOR CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS LIFE
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[redacted]

MEMORANDUM

To: Most Reverend Nicholas C. Dattilo, D.D.

From: Very Reverend Paul C. Helwig PCH

Date: June 27, 1995

Re: [redacted]/Father Joseph Pease Report

This afternoon I received a call from [redacted] of Ephrata. This is the man asked Father John Dorff for the name and phone number the person to whom he should report clergy sexual misconduct, Father Dorff gave him my name and phone number.

[redacted] said it took him a week and a half to muster the courage and energy to make the call and present the report. He is 36 years old and works as an X-ray technician at the Ephrata Hospital. For years he has been able to push these events back in his mind and, with the help of a therapist, has been able to live a fairly stable life, although he has been diagnosed with clinical depression.

The priest who is involved is Father Joseph Pease.

He said that he has felt some guilt over his cowardice at not being able to report these incidents to someone in authority, but he always hoped that someone else would come forward first. He is not sure whether Father became involved with other boys. His brother is two years older than he and at one point began some sexual experimenting with him, but he does not know if his brother got the ideas from Fr. Pease or not.

The thing that prompted him to come forward now was the article in The Catholic Witness in which the names and pictures of the pastors of the new parishes were published. Up to this time he lost track of Fr. Pease, not knowing if he had been reported and relieved of ministry, moved to another diocese, or died, but when he saw his picture in the paper he realized that he was still around, active in ministry, and now had been assigned as pastor of the merged parish in Mount Carmel to which his brother and family belong. His 12 year old nephew is an altar server in the parish.

The incidents he reported happened over 20 years ago when Father Pease was Pastor at St. Paul Church in Atlas. [redacted] lived in Atlas near the rectory and became friendly with Fr. Pease. Coming from what he described as a dysfunctional family in which

there were no strong male role models, [redacted] thought that this relationship was a good thing.

He said that he used to go a lot of places with Father. When they would be riding in the car at night Father would put his hand over and hold [redacted] hand. He did not resist. As a matter of fact he liked the attention and the idea that Father liked him.

On one occasion when [redacted] was at the rectory Father asked him to take venetian blinds to a basement shower and to wash them off. Father accompanied him to the basement and suggested that he take his clothes off and wash the blinds in the shower. This way he would not get his clothing wet. Now he knows that all Father wanted was to see his naked.

On another occasion about 10:00 p.m. Father called him to the rectory. They talked for a while and Father again held his hand. Then, he said, the experience "turned into a nightmare". The talk turned sexual. "Have you ever come yet?", Father asked. [redacted] said he didn't even know what the term meant yet. Then Father took [redacted] hand and put it inside his (Father Pease') pants and likewise took his own hand and put it inside [redacted] pants and began to fondle his genitals.

There were several other incidents.

Father Pease and [redacted] (another priest) [redacted] co-owned a boat on the Chesapeake Bay. On one occasion [redacted], the two priests, and two other boys were on the boat together. At one point Fr. Pease and [redacted] were topside (the others were below) and Fr. began to perform oral sex on him, but was interrupted when the others came up from below. Later when it was time to go to sleep [redacted] ended up sleeping on the deck closest to the stairway with the other boys. After everyone bedded down, Father came up the stairway and attempted to engage in activity with [redacted] again. The boy refused to be turned over (he was lying on his stomach), so Father took his (the boy's) hand and proceeded to masturbate himself using the boy's hand.

[redacted] has lived with these memories all his life. He said they are not repressed memories that he is just now recalling. They have been with him all these years.

I told him that I would have to present this report to Father Pease in order to investigate the matter and that normally we tell the priest who made the report. He agreed to this. We have no other reports of this nature in our files. [redacted] asked

if I could get back to him and let him know what happened when I spoke with Father and what course of action may be taken. He was not pressing for publicity or any legal involvement. He sounded genuinely concerned about his own experiences and the possible endangerment of his nephew.

P.C.H.

DOH0001663

The June 1995 Helwig Memorandum to Dattilo

On July 19, 1995, [redacted] and Monsignor Overbaugh met with Pease to discuss the allegations. Pease denied engaging in any sexual misconduct with the victim. He acknowledged that the victim spent time at the rectory and that there was "horse play" but claimed that "nothing sexual occurred." He remembered the victim and he went to the boat "…belonging to Father Bach." Pease recalled an incident in which the victim was riding in the car with him and the victim laid his head on his right leg. He also recalled an incident in which he and the victim were at the rectory and he found the victim upstairs naked. The report indicates, "Father Pease admits to saying what are you doing or some sort of comment like that and pushing him over towards the bed and then leaving immediately." In spite of these bizarre statements by Pease, Dattilo took no immediate action to remove Pease from ministry. Moreover, the Grand Jury learned that Pease was co-owner of the aforementioned boat with Bach. Bach and Pease were members of a group of predators who shared information regarding their victims and utilized that intelligence to share victims between each other. This group consisted entirely of priests from the Diocese of Harrisburg.

On July 20, 1995, [redacted] called Pease to check on him. Pease questioned the status of the inquiry regarding the victim's complaint and asked what would happen if the victim "really pushed this, would there be a 'compromise?'" [redacted] generated an internal report that recorded, "Pease then said that if anything happened 'it was not my intention of how he [the victim] interpreted it.'" [redacted] asked him if he could deny that any of the victim's accusations occurred, to which Pease replied, "No, I don't remember." Pease explained that, twenty to twenty-five years before, he was drinking heavily but that he was now in control. [redacted] asked if sexual behavior with young boys could have happened, to which Pease replied, "I don't know," with nervous laughter. Pease further stated, "I hate to go on record accusing myself. You know when you are drinking you are not in

REDACTED -- ONGOING APPELLATE LITIGATION

control as much, not thinking correctly. With kids I was usually a little more discreet." Pease again addressed the reported sexual assault involving a naked child upstairs in the rectory. In this second account, Pease said he remembered that incident and that the victim "must have gotten excited. I must have turned him on more than I thought."

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG - OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

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[redacted]

MEMORANDUM

TO: *Most Rev. Nicholas C. Dattilo*

FROM: [redacted] *

DATE: *July 20, 1995*

RE: ***FATHER JOSEPH PEASE***

I called Father Pease this evening to see how his day had been since speaking with him yesterday. He said he had not slept well. He sounded tired, his voice was flat and low.

He asked if anything had happened. I told him I spoke to the Bishop and to Father Helwig, that we were relieved he denied any sexual contact, that we would be conferring with legal counsel and Father Helwig and I would be speaking with [redacted] to let him know of his response - that Joe had denied everything.

Father Pease asked what would happen if [redacted] really pushed this, would there be a "compromise?" I told him we would have to see what happens as we go along.

Father Pease then said that if anything happened "it was not my intention of how he [redacted] interpreted it." I asked Father Pease what he meant, "If anything happened" or "whatever happened." He said "I have no memory of it. I can't remember it." I asked him if he could deny that any of [redacted] accusations occurred. He said "no, I don't remember." I asked "why can't you deny it?" He said twenty - twenty-five years ago he was "drinking heavily." He is in control now. He admitted to "a lot of drinking on the boat" and he was sure the boys were on the boat and that the boys might have stayed overnight, but "I have no memory of it."

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*REDACTED -- ONGOING APPELLATE LITIGATION

I asked Father Pease about the shower and the venetian blinds and he said he had no memory of it. He denied any memory of any of these incidents. I asked if he had any sexual contact with any of these kids. He said - no. I asked about any sexual contact with any kids anywhere. He said no he had not.

I asked if sexual behavior with young boys "could have happened?" He said "I don't know." (nervous laughter) I hate to go on record accusing myself. You know when you are drinking you are not in control as much, not thinking correctly. With kids I was usually a little more discreet."

I said this was different than what he had told Monsignor Overbaugh and I yesterday. He said yesterday it "hit me like a ton of bricks."

I asked him about his (Father Pease's) allegation that [redacted] went upstairs and was naked when Father Pease came up? He denied anything happening, because he could remember that - no alcohol involved. He said [redacted] must have gotten excited. I must have turned him on more than I thought."

Father Pease leaves for vacation on Sunday or Monday, July 23/24. From July 24-28 he is in Cincinnati, Ohio at the Weston Hotel, (513) 621-7700. The following week he will be at the shore - location unknown - with [redacted]* Divine Redeemer parish will know his location once he is at the shore.

Pease Can't Remember if he Molested Children

*REDACTED -- ONGOING APPELLATE LITIGATION

On September 7, 1995, Helwig sent a completed "Assessment Referral Information" form to the Anodos Center. In response to the question, "Disciplinary or legal action pending," the Diocesan response was, "None at this time." The response to the question, "Future ministry placement" was, "The purpose of this assessment is to find out if there are any reasons the diocese should be concerned about present or future ministry. At the present time he is in an active assignment as a pastor."

On September 11, 1995, Helwig wrote a memorandum, labelled "CONFIDENTIAL," to Dr. Ronald Karney at the Anodos Center regarding the complaint made against Father Pease. The purpose of the memorandum was to refer Pease for a psychological assessment at the Anodos Center. Helwig detailed information about the victim's complaints, including an incident in which Pease requested that a boy wash some venetian blinds and stated, "Rather than getting his clothes wet, the boy [took] them off." Additionally, Helwig discussed the occasion in which the complaining victim and two companions were "treated to a boating trip on the Chesapeake Bay" and there was an attempt to grope the boy's genitals by Pease. Helwig wrote that Pease "has no recollection of the first two events happening." He also provided information about an incident that Pease recalled in which Pease happened upon the victim naked while upstairs in the rectory. Helwig also noted at least one instance where Pease suggested that the victim met with him. Helwig closed the letter with, "At this point we are at an impasse – allegations and no admission. What we are hoping to accomplish through this assessment and other inquiries is to establish a foundation on which to stand should reports begin to circulate about the alleged misconduct and questions are asked as to why Father has been retained in ministry." In September 1995, The Anodos Center informed the Diocese that no diagnosis of Pease had been issued based on the information provided to the Center.

On December 4, 1995, Helwig and [redacted] met with the victim and obtained further details regarding abusive incidents. Helwig and [redacted] also informed the victim that Pease underwent a psychological assessment and the professionals "could find no reason to recommend that Father [Pease] not be active in ministry [sic] at this time." Dattilo dispatched a one page letter on January 11, 1996, and reminded Pease that it was "inappropriate" for minors to be in any place other than the public areas of the rectory and that minors should not be employed in parish offices. Dattilo closed the letter by stating, "Parish settings offer priests a variety of opportunities to interact with young people…." With Dattilo's approval, Pease continued in active ministry at Divine Redeemer in Mr. Carmel until December 2002.

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GRAND JURY EXHIBIT 370 8/17/17

January 11, 1996

COPY

Reverend Joseph M. Pease
Divine Redeemer Church
438 West Avenue
Mount Carmel, PA 17851-2012

Dear Father Pease,

In light of a recent report that was presented to the diocese regarding your association with a young man in a past assignment, permit me to bring to your attention those parts of the Program for Priestly Life which pertain to priests and young people.

In the section titled Priestly Life it states:

"It is entirely inappropriate for minors to be in any place other than in public areas of the rectory and is not to be permitted." (A. para.9)

"The practice of employing or engaging minors (18 years or younger) to answer telephones and doors in rectories or parish offices is unsafe and potentially a serious liability, and is not permitted." (A. para.10)

These and other prudent personal boundaries regarding associations and activities with young people should be diligently observed by every priest so as to avoid misunderstanding and even the appearance of inappropriateness.

Parish settings offer priests a variety of opportunities to interact with young people to their benefit; however, priests must always act with prudence and good common sense.

I pray that your new year will be a good and peaceful one.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Very Reverend Paul C. Helwig
Secretary for Clergy
and Religious Life

DOH0001685

Dattilo Noted Opportunities to Interact with Young People

On January 6, 2002, the *Boston Globe* brought national attention to clergy abuse cases after uncovering child sexual abuse and a cover-up within the Archdiocese of Boston. On September 13, 2002, an attorney representing a sexual abuse victim wrote a letter to Carol Houghton of the Diocese and requested an investigation into incidents of alleged sexual abuse by Pease committed in approximately 1972. About one week later, Dattilo issued a decree ordering an investigation. The decree indicated, "To safeguard the reputation of all persons involved, all acts of this investigation, including this Decree, are to be kept in the secret archives of the Diocesan curia unless they become necessary for penal process (canon 1719)."

On December 13, 2002, exactly three months after receiving the letter from the victim's attorney, Dattilo issued a decree announcing the conclusion of the investigation based on Pease's admission of guilt when confronted with the allegations. Dattilo indicated that a temporary penal precept had been issued pending arrangements for permanent removal from active ministry. Pease wrote a letter which requested retirement, effective immediately. The letter contained a note reading "Accepted" and dated December 17, 2002, initialed by Dattilo.

On December 21, 2002, Dattilo personally delivered a prepared statement to the Divine Redeemer Parish, Mount Carmel, and subsequently read this same statement at St. Joseph's Parish. In his statement, Dattilo explained that Pease had admitted to "inappropriate sexual contact with an adolescent." He stated:

> Initially, this report came to the attention of the diocese in June of 1995. Following the diocesan policy in force at that time, Father Pease was confronted immediately with the allegation. Because of serious discrepancies in the accounts, and in the absence of an admission of guilt, Father Pease was asked to undergo a professional assessment. The results of that evaluation, which included medical, spiritual and psychiatric examinations, provided insufficient basis to resolve the discrepancies and to determine guilt.

Following this announcement, three other victims came forward and reported that Pease sexually abused them.

In January 2003, Pease officially retired as a priest. On January 10, 2003, Carol Houghton and Father Edward Malesic were engaged in an investigation regarding alleged sex abuse committed by another priest, Father John Allen. As part of that investigation, Houghton and Malesic interviewed [redacted]. [redacted] The Grand Jury [redacted] heard from Houghton in her live testimony before the Grand Jury.

[redacted] recalled that Pease told him that he had been asked to go for an evaluation in 1995. Pease disclosed that he had been accused of sexual misconduct with a child. [redacted] also reported that he and Pease were out [redacted] one day and encountered an adult male. Pease told [redacted] that he had "fondled" the man when the man was a child. [redacted]

 REDACTED -- ONGOING APPELLATE LITIGATION

[redacted] also disclosed he was aware of another predatory priest named David Luck. [redacted] told Houghton that Pease was very concerned that he might be brought up in a 2002 investigation regarding Luck's contact with two brothers.

MEMO

Today, January 10, 2003, Fr. Malesic and I met with [redacted] to depose him regarding his knowledge of [redacted] interaction with young adolescent males [redacted]

Following his deposition regarding [redacted], I asked [redacted] if he had anything he wanted to tell us regarding Fr. Joe Pease. [redacted]

[redacted] recalled that in 1995, when the first accusation had come forward involving Joe Pease, Joe had gone to see [redacted] He told [redacted] that he had been asked to go to Downingtown for an evaluation. [redacted] Of course, we know that at Downingtown, Joe Pease gave a clear denial of any sexual activity with a minor, and it was on that basis (his denial) that Bishop decided he did not have enough reason at that time to remove Joe from ministry.

[redacted] then recounted two instances of Joe Pease's sexual involvement with minors, that Joe told [redacted] about, sometime around 1993 [redacted]

[redacted]

DOHe0003313

REDACTED -- ONGOING APPELLATE LITIGATION

The second instance was more vague. [redacted] stated that he and Joe Pease were out [redacted] and they ran across a man working here that Joe had known years ago. Joe admitted to [redacted] that he had "fondled" this man when he was a minor. Again, [redacted] had no name to offer us.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Carol L. Houghton, STD, JCD
Rev. Edward C. Malesic, JCL

DOHe0003314

[redacted] Knew Pease was Molesting Children

Pease was no longer in active ministry in 2014, but a determination had not been made as to whether he should remain a suspended priest or be removed from the priesthood. On September 2, 2014, Bishop Ronald Gainer wrote a letter to the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith in Rome and explained the history of allegations and responses by the Diocese of Harrisburg. He detailed the initial report of sexual abuse in June of 1995 regarding conduct that occurred between 1971 and 1973. Gainer detailed the various statements of Pease and his statements regarding his inability to recall if he committed the offenses and the possibility that he "turned on" the victim. He then documented that this same victim raised the sexual abuse complaint a second time in 2002 and Diocesan staff again confronted Pease. During the second confrontation, he noted that, Pease admitted multiple inappropriate sexual contacts with the victim. Gainer noted that Dattilo had issued a Penal Precept and that three additional victims came forward after Pease was removed from ministry.

In Gainer's letter to the Vatican he stated that the "scandal caused by his [Pease's] admission of the sexual abuse of a minor has been sufficiently repaired by his acceptance of the December 2002 Penal Precept..." He wrote, "I am not certain that Joseph Pease fully understands the gravity of his actions (he kept wanting to deny the accusation, kept going back to not remembering, but saying if the accuser had such clear recollections, then it had to be true)." In the next paragraph, Gainer stated "...I believe that the harm done by his past sexual misconduct is being sufficiently repaired. Therefore, before God, Your Eminence, and in all good conscience, I am not requesting at this time, that any judicial trial or administrative process be initiated that may lead to his dismissal from the clerical state." As he closed his letter, Gainer wrote:

> I am not seeking the initiation of a trial, nor dismissal from the clerical state. Instead, I request from the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith that Joseph Michael Pease be permitted to live out his remaining years in prayer and penance, without adding further anxiety or suffering to his situation, and without risking

> public knowledge of his crimes. Allow him, Your Eminence, to live out his life peacefully, in prayer and penance, recognizing the harm he has caused in the lives of others, and making amends for it.

The Grand Jury disagrees. While removing Pease from ministry was a start, he was clearly unfit to carry the title of priest. Moreover, public knowledge of Pease's crime is exactly what was required in service to the public and Pease's victims. Therefore, the Grand Jury details the case of Father Pease, as permitted by law, in service to the victims and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.