

I, Michael McDonnell, was repeatedly sexually abused at ages 11-13 by Father Francis X. Trauger and Father John P. Schmeer. Trauger and Schmeer abused me when they were assigned by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to my family's parish, Saint Titus in Norristown, Pennsylvania. The abuse took place from 1980-1982 while I was in sixth and seventh grade at Saint Titus grade school and serving as an altar boy at the church.

Both of my perpetrators were abusers known to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, which allowed them to utilize their position in the Archdiocese to prey on multiple children. Schmeer, who the Archdiocese kept as a priest and continued to support as he lives a life of "prayer and penance" was a resident priest at Saint Titus while teaching at Bishop Kenrick High School.

Trauger, now laicized and recently charged in Bucks County, September 2019 at age 74 because of his sexual abuse of children. His last assignment was 1993 – 2003 at St. Michaels in Levittown PA. Nothing in Traugers pattern to prey on children has ever changed, nor has how the Archdiocese handling. I was afforded the opportunity to be with D.A. Matt Weintraub and lead investigators to help however I can.

Trauger was an assistant pastor at Saint Titus. Trauger was assigned to Saint Titus from June 1980 to September 1981. Both Schmeer and Trauger had sexually abused other children in the Archdiocese before abusing me. The Archdiocese maintained secret files on the allegations against both of these priests. In 1994, the Archdiocese identified Trauger in a memo listing priests who were the subject of sexual abuse allegations. Nothing was done about Trauger in response to this memo. In fact, despite multiple instances of abuse, Trauger was merely transferred and allowed to prey on more children. It was wasn't until law enforcement began subpoenaing records of priest as part of the 2005 Philadelphia Grand Jury investigation that Trauger and Schmeer were finally removed from active ministry. Both Trauger and Schmeer were identified as abusers in the 2005 report issued by the Philadelphia Grand Jury.

A. Schmeer

I was one of eight children from a devout catholic family that revered and respected clergy. At Schmeer's suggestion, I served as an altar boy and worked in the rectory at Saint Titus. Schmeer used his position to manipulate me to satisfy his perverse and deviate sexual interests. Schmeer would often force me into a sexually-focused confession, asking me about his masturbation habits. When I tried to avoid the subject, Schmeer insisted, questioning me incessantly about masturbation. Schmeer would ask me and other altar boys whether they "played with" themselves. Schmeer would also ask me "What is the capital of Thailand?" and would respond "Bangkok," accompanied by a fist punch/grab to Michael's groin.

Schmeer's verbal boundary violations advanced to physical molestation. I was often scheduled to perform as an altar boy for Schmeer's masses, serving multiple masses a week, including early morning weekday masses. On at least more than two dozen occasions, Schmeer would fondle my genitals in the sacristy of the church at Saint Titus. He would come in to the sacristy where the altar boys would change into their robes. Under the guise of adjusting their robes, he would rub himself against me. He would pin me against the counters and press himself into him. Additionally, Schmeer would bring me to his personal quarters in the rectory. He would touch my genitals and buttocks. He showed sexual scenes of naked men on a video in his quarters in the rectory and attempted to engage in sexual conversation with me regarding the naked male actors' buttocks. Schmeer also used his position to take me out of town. Schmeer took me and other altar boys to Schmeer's shore house in Mystic Island, NJ on several occasions. He would have the boys change in front of him. One time at the shore house, Schmeer wrestled me to the ground, pulled down my shorts, and placed live crabs on his exposed body. He called this the "crab treatment." I was not the first or only boy victimized by Schmeer.

Schmeer's perverse and masochistic abuse of me and the other boys occurred because of the Archdiocese's fostering a culture among its followers of revering priests, ignoring and concealing allegations against them, and at all times elevating their position in the church hierarchy above the mere laity. My own mother revered Schmeer, never questioning his suggestions of her son being an altar boy, working at the rectory, or coming to New Jersey with him. Being victimized by a priest was being victimized by God's ordained agent. Because of this, I and so many others felt compelled to remain silent and accept the exploitation of priests like Schmeer.

B. Trauger

Like Schmeer, I first met Trauger while serving as an altar boy at Saint Titus. I, a seventh grader, was sexually abused by Trauger during a trip to Trauger's home in the Poconos in June 1981. Trauger insisted that I sleep with him in the only bed in the home. Trauger also ordered that I sleep in only underwear. When I protested, Trauger replied, "you are growing up, Mike." Trauger was a large man, known to have a quick and explosive temper. Fearing Trauger's temper, I complied. Before sleeping, Trauger asked me to rub Trauger's legs and back with lotion. Again fearful, I complied. I awoke to find my underwear was pulled down to the thighs, Trauger was rubbing my penis, and I don't know if I or Trauger had ejaculated. My anus was sore. I jumped from the bed and sat on the porch until morning. When Trauger came out from the bedroom, I told him that he was not feeling well and that he wanted to go home. He and Trauger did not speak of the incident. Driven by the shame brought on by the abuse, I did not say anything.

Shortly thereafter, however, the Archdiocese learned of Trauger's sexual abuse of kids at St. Titus. In August of 1981, shortly after Trauger assaulted me, two families reported to the pastor of Saint Titus that Fr. Trauger had molested their young sons, schoolmates of

mine. Just like myself, both had been taken overnight to the Poconos and forced to sleep in bed with the priest.

Shockingly, Fr. Trauger admitted he had taken boys to the Poconos, slept in the same bed with them, and “massaged” them. Fr. Trauger also admitted that “two similar events occurred at his mountain home in the spring with two other boys from the parish,” which would be consistent with the abuse of me. The Archdiocese, as was its practice, did not ask the identity of the two unnamed boys Trauger admitted to sleeping with in the Poconos. Trauger was instead, quietly transferred from St. Titus. There was no disclosure to the parish and no warning to others. As a result, I and other victims continued to suffer in silence and isolation for decades, letting their shame fester and destroy their lives. Trauger would go on to minister to children in the Archdiocese of another 22 years.

While the Archdiocese was transferring and protecting Fr. Trauger, I suffered like so many victims. As a result of the abuse, I developed an alcohol addiction and significant mental health issues. In 2005, then 37 years old, I told his Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor about the abuse - the first time that he had told anyone. Thereafter, in September 2006, I reported the abuse to the Victims Assistance Office, where he was interviewed by Louise Hagner from the Archdiocese. Over the following three months, I was contacted and interviewed by Jack Rossiter, an investigator hired by the Archdiocese. In December of 2006, Rossiter told me that Trauger had admitted to sexually abusing me. Hagner later also confirmed this admission along with the Archdiocesan Review Board findings that Trauger had abused me. Hagner also indicated that she believed my account with respect to Schmeer. While Hagner and Rossiter both made these statements corroborating abuse, none of the documents from the Archdiocese’s investigation into my abuse were provided to me.

It cannot be ignored that my attempt to heal and recover from the abuse he suffered was delayed because of the Archdiocese’s decades of covering up and facilitating abuse. Had the Archdiocese moved to stop Trauger in 1981, I would have known he was not the only victim. I would have seen the abuse was not my fault. I would have had an opportunity to receive treatment as a young teen, instead of living in a world of shame and secrets. Had the Archdiocese shown concern for the sheep of the flock instead of protecting the abusive shepherd, twenty-five years of my life would have been very different.

The abuse has tormented me since 11 years old. A lot of life was taken from me. I have suffered with the severe psychological harm of his repeated sexual abuse by Trauger and Schmeer. I suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (“PTSD”) manifested with a number of symptoms, including nightmares, flashbacks, fear and helplessness, along with anxiety and depression. I developed an alcohol addiction as a result of the abuse. I began drinking in the sixth grade to cope with the abuse, attempting to suppress the feelings of fear, anger, and resentment experienced daily. I work to manage addiction in the face of his childhood trauma and now been sober (a second time) for more than four years. The feelings of shame and guilt I continue to experience has had a substantial effect on self-esteem, so

much so that I contemplated suicide and sought crisis intervention from mental health providers for this suicidality on several occasions.

In 2010, I was convicted in this Commonwealth of theft by deception from the Archdiocese, which was driven from a sense of revenge for the abuse and the Archdiocese's continued refusal to provide some relief and compensate victims. (In contrast my bail was secured \$100,000 while my abuser was given unsecured \$250,000 bail and free to return to NY State) I have served a sentence of work release and serve probation associated with the charge. I continue to be responsible, remorseful and accountable for my actions. I pay the Archdiocese restitution. In short, I have committed to pay back the Archdiocese what I took from it. The Archdiocese, through its predatory priests who victimized me and its managers who ignored those perpetrators and facilitated the abuse, however, has taken much from me that has not been resolved.

I have received significant mental health and substance abuse treatments over the past two decades related to the abuse. Most of these lengthy treatments were funded by state assistance. In 1998, I received "crisis treatment" for three days at Montgomery Hospital Crisis to treat psychological symptoms. This treatment was prior to me disclosing his abuse and was diagnosed as severe depression and anxiety.

In January 2005, I entered the Malvern Institute for Alcohol Dependency, participating in a rehab program. There, I received treatment related to his alcoholism and co-occurring mental health diagnosis. After discharge from the inpatient treatment on January 24, 2005, I lived in a recovery house and sober living (New Found Freedom in Levittown, Pennsylvania) for a year until February 2006.

In May 2010, I was voluntarily committed for inpatient psychiatric treatment at the Horsham Clinic for 15 days. I was noted to have a history of Major Depressive Disorder and PTSD. As an example of how the abuse tormented me despite the decades that had passed, I was described as depressed and suicidal on intake. At Horsham, I was diagnosed with PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Having flashbacks of the abuse by Trauger and Schmeer and I came to Horsham with suicidal thoughts of throwing himself in front of a train. I was stabilized at Horsham on Zoloft and was discharged to participate in the outpatient program at Pennndel Mental Health Center in Langhorne. From May 2010 through October 2010, I received outpatient psychiatric treatment (90-day program) from Pennndel Mental Health.

Despite all of this treatment for mental health and work in twelve step recovery and survivors' groups, I began decompensation again in 2013. In the summer of 2013, I

underwent a psychiatric evaluation at Lenape Valley Foundation in Bristol, Pennsylvania to treat symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety. I was experiencing daily memories of abuse, causing anxiety. I told the providers that I avoided church and devout members of his family. He described himself as emotionally numb.

Starting in the summer of 2014, I deteriorated further. On July 29, 2014, I was seen for a crisis evaluation and admitted for a voluntary psychological treatment at Lenape Valley. I presented with suicidal thoughts of slitting his wrists or jumping in front of a train.

Since his discharge from the July 2013 crisis hospitalization, I've continued on medication management with Lenape Valley. Throughout treatment at Lenape Valley, my Treatment Plan identified the primary issue to address as PTSD related to this abuse. The symptoms identified in the treatment plan include "difficulty falling asleep, irritability, bad dreams. . . feeling as if the event was actually reoccurring, psychological or physiological reactivity to the cues related to the event, recurrent/intrusive recollections/dreams of event."

From the summer of 2014 through the summer of 2015, I continued to deteriorate. I had half a dozen crisis visits at Lower Bucks Hospital Emergency Room and Lenape Valley for symptoms related to alcoholism, narcotic abuse, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. I experienced a relapse into addiction and was reported to be self-medicating with alcohol. It was noted that shame, a common result of victims of childhood sexual abuse, created a barrier to Michael's treatment.

From April 2015 through July 2015, I received intensive treatment for relapse into drug addiction and alcoholism, and co-occurring disorder at Gaudenzia in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After discharge from Gaudenzia, I continued in outpatient therapy at Lenape Valley. From July 2015 through January 2017, I received both group and individual therapy at Lenape Valley, along with the medication management for his PTSD and other psychological diagnoses. It is notable that there are numerous triggers harkening back to the abuse that increase my PTSD symptoms. Examples include attending a church carnival with my son, interaction with his family around the holidays, Holy Week, news of former employer being accused of molesting children, discussing the abuse in therapy and news coverage of clergy abuse.

Today, I work as a Peer Specialist at a facility specializing in the treatment of drug and alcohol addiction. I continue to attend AA meetings four times per week. I also attend co-occurring disorder meetings. I am active and participate in survivors' groups. While these therapies help me cope with the trauma, I continue to experience flashbacks and nightmares related to this abuse, suffering from frequent bouts of depression and anxiety.

Because of the havoc wreaked on my psyche as a young child by the leaders of his trusted faith, maintaining my mental health and sobriety has and will continue to be an ongoing struggle for my entire life.

Justice can heal wounds. This legislature has the power to stop the trauma being handed down to other generations. Therefore, I cannot support a constitutional referendum. Victims have long held the liability, lives are in jeopardy and survivors have been pawned. Adding time to this process is adding cruelty to the trauma. We listened to negotiations last November here in the Senate and I urge you to Eliminate the Statute of limitations moving forward, so tomorrows victims will have full access to justice and open the window to justice to ALL victims. Experts tell me that a window is constitutional. Since 2003, Grand jury reports, from investigations, into every Catholic diocese in the Commonwealth have recommended elimination and suspension or window legislation. A constitutional amendment is an unnecessary delay and denial of justice

Michael William McDonnell 9/27/2019