

Father Francis X. Trauger

One night in a Poconos motel in the spring of 1981, Fr. Francis X. Trauger repeatedly tried to anally penetrate a 12-year-old altar boy and for hours manually manipulated his penis. After the 5th-grader's parents reported the abuse through their parish pastor, the Archdiocese recorded the event this way: "They shared the same bed and there were touches."

The pastor passed on other allegations against the priest, involving another boy. The Archdiocese report stated: "same bed: touches." A few days later, Fr. Trauger himself told an Archdiocese official that "two similar events" occurred that spring with still two other boys. Subsequent years saw Church officials record other reports of "touches" and "camping."

The Archdiocese's use of such delicate euphemisms had the effect of concealing the true nature of Fr. Trauger's crimes. Whether the result of intentional obfuscation or a refusal to interview victims directly, the Archdiocese's responses to abuse allegations effectively shielded the priest from legal or criminal action and facilitated decades of sexual predation.

Ordained in 1972, Fr. Trauger was transferred eight times during his long career, each time to a parish with a school attached, each time without a warning to parish parents about the priest's predilections. Six of the transfers occurred after 1981, when the Archdiocese began recording abuse allegations.

Father Trauger is transferred following 1981 abuse reports.

The first recorded accusation against Fr. Francis Trauger reached the Chancellor of the Archdiocese, Monsignor Francis J. Statkus, on August 6, 1981. Two families had reported to Fr. Anthony McGuire, the pastor of Saint Titus Church in Norristown, that Fr. Trauger had molested their young sons. One of the boys, "Evan," was 12 years old; the other, "Carl," was 13. Both had been taken by the assistant pastor, on separate occasions, overnight to the Poconos, where the priest had the boys sleep in his bed.

Monsignor Statkus recorded the barest description of the abuse itself. He wrote only that the boys shared a bed with the priest and there were "touches." He added, regarding the abuse of Evan: "reportedly, according to Msgr. McG, no sodomy." He did not record whether there was sodomy with Carl.

Monsignor Statkus wrote extensively, however, about the character of the two boys' families, apparently with an eye toward whether either would make the assaults

public. Evan's mother and father were "fine parishioners, cooperative workers, and credible." They "kept this matter to themselves." Carl's parents, on the other hand, were "not stable." They reportedly had spoken to others about their son's night with Fr. Trauger. Monsignor McGuire, according to Msgr. Statkus's notes, was "of the mind that there is scandal in the parish and that Father T should be transferred."

On August 10, 1981, Fr. Trauger admitted to Msgr. Statkus's assistant, Fr. Donald Walker, that he had taken the boys to the Poconos, slept in the same bed with them, and "massaged" them. The incident with Evan took place in March 1981, while the one with Carl occurred in June 1981. Father Walker wrote that Fr. Trauger admitted that "two similar events occurred at his mountain home in the spring with two other boys from the parish" in addition to Evan and Carl.

Father Walker did not ask the identity of the two unnamed boys. There is no record that he, or anyone from the Archdiocese, contacted the known victims or their families. Rather, Fr. Walker instructed Fr. Trauger not to contact the boys again, to "desist" from one-on-one interactions with boys in general, and to secure professional help.

Monsignor Statkus's delicate description of the abuse as "touches" was not the gruesome picture the Grand Jury received. On December 11, 2003, Evan told the Grand Jury that he was 11 or 12 years old when Fr. Trauger molested him in the shower at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary and attempted to anally rape him at a motel in the Poconos.

Evan had been an altar boy in 5th grade, under Fr. Trauger's supervision. He testified that he initially liked the attention Fr. Trauger paid to the boys in the parish, playing basketball and visiting the school's classrooms.

Evan was enthusiastic when Fr. Trauger took him to the seminary to play basketball. When the priest suggested they shower together and then moved from soaping the boy's back to fondling his penis, Evan was confused. Evan resisted efforts by Fr. Trauger to make the boy handle the priest's penis, so the priest rubbed his penis against the boy's backside. Evan said he didn't know whether what the priest had done was normal or abnormal, but he felt nauseous afterwards and could not speak with his family about what happened.

Now a grown man, Evan, a police officer, cried as he testified about what happened when Fr. Trauger took him overnight to the Poconos — supposedly to see a house that the priest was thinking of buying and then to go skiing. Evan said that looking at the house entailed going to a rundown house, peering through windows, but not going inside. Skiing never happened at all. Instead, Fr. Trauger took the boy to a motel. Although there were two beds, the priest insisted they sleep in one to save housekeeping some work. In order to explain why the boy needed to sleep naked, the priest turned the heat up high.

Although Evan assumed a fetal position on the edge of the bed, and pretended to be asleep, the priest's hand was soon on the boy's penis. Evan described an unbearably long night of abuse. He said the priest fondled his penis for hours. He could feel the priest's rubbing against his back. After a while, he said, the priest moved his penis toward the boy's anus. He remembered Fr. Trauger persistently trying to penetrate the boy. Evan was not sure whether the priest succeeded in penetrating him anally. Evan said the next thing he remembered was the sunlight. The priest's hand was still on the boy's penis. He could not remember getting dressed or the drive home.

Although Evan's abuse was reported (the exact nature of the report cannot be determined from Father Statkus's notes of "same bed" and "touches"), along with Carl's in 1981, no one from the Archdiocese asked Evan about it until November 2003, when he was contacted by an investigator who had been hired by the Archdiocese's law firm to assist the Review Board. Evan told the Grand Jury that he said to himself, "twenty-three years and finally somebody wants to ask me what happened." Although Evan had never even told his wife, he agreed to meet the investigator because "he had a lot to say."

Evan said he had always felt guilty about not telling anyone so that Fr. Trauger could be stopped. He did not realize that others had informed the Archdiocese about Fr. Trauger and that it was not Evan's fault that the priest actively ministered to children for 22 more years.

On August 12, 1981, six days after receiving the complaints regarding Evan and Carl, Cardinal Krol transferred Fr. Trauger to Saint Matthew, another Philadelphia parish with a school. Father Trauger had his first appointment with a psychologist who was to evaluate his mental fitness on August 13. After three one-hour appointments with Dr.

Dennis Donnelly, Fr. Trauger himself reported the results to Assistant Chancellor Walker. According to Fr. Walker's notes, Fr. Trauger told him that Dr. Donnelly had "found no evidence of homosexual problems on the part of Father T but there was a gross error in judgment." Father Trauger promised that a written evaluation would follow, but none was found in the priest's file.

Following a 1982 abuse report, Father Trauger is transferred again.

A year later, on August 2, 1982, Fr. Trauger again was accused of making sexual advances toward a student at his parish school. According to Chancellor Statkus's notes, on July 22, 1982, Fr. Trauger took 14-year-old "Marty" to his Pocono mountain house, ostensibly so that the boy could help mow the grass. Marty's father told Msgr. Statkus that Fr. Trauger made the boy sleep with him in a small tent, under one blanket, although there were two bedrooms in the priest's house. Marty told his father that, throughout the night, Fr. Trauger touched and rubbed up against the boy even though he kept telling the priest to stay on his own side. The next morning, the priest drove Marty home, but while they waited for his parents, who were out, Fr. Trauger tried to tickle and "wrestle" with the boy. When his parents arrived home, they found Marty outside their property, upset and crying.

When his father asked what was wrong, Marty related the above account, though his father suspected there was more that Marty did not tell him. Marty also told his father that he did not want to accompany Fr. Trauger on a planned two-week camping trip to South Dakota.

Marty's father was a detective in the Philadelphia police department. He reported Fr. Trauger's actions to the morals division of the police department on the morning of August 2, 1982. After hearing his complaint, an unnamed morals division officer contacted David McKenzie at the Catholic Youth Organization office. McKenzie, in turn, contacted Msgr. Statkus, who arranged to meet with the father on the afternoon of August 2.

Monsignor Statkus wrote after his meeting with Marty's father, the detective: "The [parents] have not discussed this with anyone outside the family and an officer of the Morals Division. The priests of Saint Matthew were not contacted by him or by Chancery. I suggest that no mention be made to the priests. . . ." Monsignor Statkus also noted that he

had successfully diverted Marty's father from pursuing the matter with the police or otherwise: "Convinced of our sincere resolve to take the necessary action regarding Fr. T., Mr. [...] does not plan to press any charges, police or otherwise."

When Msgr. Statkus tried to contact Fr. Trauger on August 2, 1982, the priest was in South Dakota camping with two boys from Saint Matthew's School. The Chancellor immediately asked his assistant, Fr. Walker, to contact Dr. Donnelly for reassurance that Fr. Trauger was "not of a homosexual orientation." And Cardinal Krol, who had routinely reassigned Fr. Trauger to a new parish after four similar incidents the year before, declared the case "very serious."

While Archdiocese officials quickly took steps necessary to keep Marty's father from pursuing charges criminally, their records show no action taken with regard to the two boys camping with Fr. Trauger in South Dakota. Despite the "very serious" nature of this case, there is no evidence that the Archdiocese contacted the parents. According to notes of an August 8, 1982, meeting with Fr. Trauger, Msgr. Statkus questioned the priest about Marty, but asked nothing about the other two boys, including their identity. Monsignor Statkus recorded that Fr. Trauger told him of about eight camping trips he had taken with young boys during the preceding year. Again, there was no mention of an inquiry into who these boys were or what happened on the camping trips.

At Cardinal Krol's direction, Msgr. Statkus informed Fr. Trauger that his assignment at Saint Matthew was terminated, that his faculties were suspended pending evaluation, and that he was to report to Villa Saint John Vianney Hospital, the church-affiliated treatment center in Downingtown. Fr. Trauger underwent an evaluation there on August 11, 1982. His evaluating psychologist, Phillip J. Miraglia, recommended inpatient treatment followed by an "intensive retreat" and outpatient therapy.

Dr. Miraglia found "frustration regarding sexual expression and some confusion regarding sexual object choice." However, the psychologist thought the "quality of the responses . . . benign." The therapist understated the seriousness of the charges against Fr. Trauger in his final report of September 24, 1982, in which he commended Fr. Trauger's acceptance of "the fact that he demonstrated poor judgment in planning a camping trip with a young student." No mention was made that Fr. Trauger had, in fact, inappropriately

touched at least five boys in the previous 18 months and gone “camping” with innumerable others. The weakness of the report may not be the fault of Dr. Miraglia, who may not have been made aware of any behavior other than “physical contact” with one boy while camping.

The Cardinal’s response to this “very serious case” was, once again, to transfer Fr. Trauger to a different parish. On October 1, 1982, Cardinal Krol assigned Fr. Trauger to Saint Francis DeSales in West Philadelphia, a parish with a grammar school. Monsignor Statkus again instructed the priest not to take trips with boys, but he encouraged Fr. Trauger to participate in the parish’s youth activities including, “visiting the school, moderating the altar boys . . . as well as the CYO.”

Monsignor Statkus further told Fr. Trauger “that his most recent indiscretion was viewed as a very serious matter and was filled with extremely dire circumstances which could have led to greater scandal.” Although the obfuscations and vagueness of documents make it difficult to establish exactly how the Archdiocese saw Fr. Trauger’s “recent indiscretion” compared to his previous ones, one important difference, and one that clearly got the attention of the Archdiocese, was that the father of the victim of the most recent indiscretion was a police detective who had made a police report.

With serious allegations against him, Father Trauger is reassigned to four more parishes.

Father Trauger was transferred four more times in his career. He went as parochial vicar to Saint Matthew, Conshohocken, in June 1985 and left in September 1988. From there he went to Annunciation B.V.M., in South Philadelphia, staying less than a year. In June 1989 he was transferred to Saint Joseph, in Aston, Delaware County, where he remained until June 1993, when Cardinal Bevilacqua appointed him parochial vicar of Saint Michael the Archangel in Levittown.

Cardinal Bevilacqua, having become Archbishop in February 1988, was responsible for three of the reassignments. With allegations described by Cardinal Krol as “extremely serious” from three named victims on file, along with several other admissions

of suspicious but unexplored “events,” “touches,” and “camping,” Archbishop Bevilacqua named Fr. Trauger Parochial Vicar of three parishes with grade schools.

There is nothing on record to indicate that the priest’s activities with youth were restricted in any way or that anyone in the new parishes, including the pastors, was ever informed of the reasons why Fr. Trauger had left past assignments.

The Archdiocese in 1991 receives a report that Father Trauger is stalking a boy.

Archbishop Bevilacqua’s last transfer of Fr. Trauger – to Saint Michael the Archangel in 1993 – followed a report that in April 1991, while Parochial Vicar at Saint Joseph’s, Fr. Trauger had stalked a student at Saint John Neumann High School after encountering the boy in a center city bookstore. Even the less-than-rigorous “investigation” conducted by Archbishop Bevilacqua’s staff revealed that Fr. Trauger used his standing as a priest to track down personal information about this student. First, he ascertained the boy’s name from Fr. Ronald Rossi, vice principal at his high school. Then he obtained the boy’s phone number, address, and family information from Fr. Dominic Chiaravalle, the boy’s pastor at Epiphany in South Philadelphia. The next day, Fr. Trauger used his priestly status to remove the boy from class, take him to a room, and presume to “counsel” the boy for an hour and a half about the homosexual pornography he had been perusing in the bookstore.

The boy’s mother called the school, concerned when her son did not return home as scheduled. She called school officials again, very upset, when she learned the content of her son’s conversation with the unfamiliar priest. She did not know that the priest had made sexual advances during their “conversation.” Nor, it appears from records, did Archdiocese officials, because they did not question the student about the incident. (According to a February 9, 2004, recommendation by the Archdiocesan Review Board, prepared after the boy was finally interviewed in 2003, he reported that, in addition to talking about sex, Fr. Trauger felt the boy’s knee and upper thigh.)

School officials reported the incident to the Archdiocese on April 12, 1991. Secretary for Clergy John J. Jagodzinski recorded the report – though not the name of the student involved – and forwarded it to Msgr. Molloy. Monsignor Molloy interviewed Fr.

Trauger on April 15. The priest admitted approaching the boy in the bookstore; introducing himself as a priest; telling the boy, who was wearing a Neumann High School jacket, that the priest knew the principal, vice principal, and several teachers at the boy's school; questioning the boy about pornography; and asking the boy's name (which the boy refused to give). The priest admitted to tracking the boy down, removing him from class, meeting alone in a small room with the boy for an hour and a half, and questioning whether the boy thought he was gay.

In a four-page memo recording his interview with Fr. Trauger, Msgr. Molloy still did not mention the boy's name. Finally, after Fr. Rossi, the vice principal, called for a second time about the incident, Msgr. Molloy recorded the boy's last name – "Logue."

Monsignor Molloy testified that even though he knew of Fr. Trauger's history of abuse when he was dealing with the incident in 1991, Archdiocese officials never interviewed the boy. Monsignor Molloy attempted to justify the failure to remove Fr. Trauger from his parish or restrict his access to schools and children, claiming that the Archdiocese lacked "hard evidence" against the priest. Knowing that Fr. Trauger was in a position to stalk, harass and abuse Archdiocese children, Church officials allowed him to continue in his position as Parochial Vicar at Saint Joseph's. Two years later he was transferred to Saint Michael the Archangel in Levittown.

Cardinal Bevilacqua assigns Father Trauger to another parish with a school.

When Archbishop Bevilacqua appointed Fr. Trauger as Parochial Vicar of Saint Michael in 1993, Archdiocese officials knew of accusations against the priest by four named boys (Evan, Carl, Marty, and the Logue boy). They knew of two other boys whom Fr. Trauger had admitted touching inappropriately. And they knew of many more who had gone "camping" with the priest.

Yet in these 10 years of accusations, Archdiocese officials never sought to question a single victim directly to find out what Fr. Trauger had done. Nor did they seek out the families of known victims so they could stop the continuing abuse of their children. Instead, they recorded hearsay accusations and determined that they lacked "hard

evidence.” Then the Archbishop would reassign the priest, or not, apparently depending on whether it was necessary to prevent exposure or scandal.

In his testimony before the Grand Jury, Msgr. Edward Cullen, the Vicar General, admitted that the Archdiocese’s investigation into the 1991 stalking of the Logue boy was not handled correctly and that the boy and his family should have been interviewed. He explained that Fr. Trauger was not endorsed for a high school chaplaincy in 1991 because it would “make sense to not put that person in a high school.” In light of that recognition of the risk Fr. Trauger posed, Msgr. Cullen was at a loss to explain why Cardinal Bevilacqua appointed Fr. Trauger as Parochial Vicar at Saint Michael, which he described as having a large school.

On December 18, 2003, after Fr. Trauger’s files were subpoenaed by this Grand Jury, the Archdiocese announced that it was removing him from the ministry, finding the allegations against him “credible.” Father Trauger had admitted on December 12 to Secretary for Clergy Lynn that he had sexually abused the three boys who had made allegations against him.

Father Trauger appeared before the Grand Jury and was given an opportunity to answer questions concerning the allegations against him. He chose not to do so.