

Father James Burnett

The failure of an internal review

First victim deemed “not credible”

But after two more victims and a lawsuit, the diocese changed its mind

The personnel file of James Burnett is the perfect example of the failure of the modern diocese lay review board.

Burnett’s first victim came forward in 2005. When the diocese was made aware of the allegations, Burnett submitted to a lie detector test, which was inconclusive. Soon, a second victim came forward with similar allegations. Burnett was only placed on leave when a lawsuit was filed.

The case was referred to the lay review board, who found the first allegation not credible. They did, however, find that the second allegation was credible.

Soon, a third victim came forward. After a lawsuit was settled in 2013, the Diocese conceded that all three allegations were credible.

TIMELINE OF DOCUMENTS – JAMES BURNETT

6/25/68 – Ordained

6/15/68-2/15/74 – Associate, St. Charles Borromeo, Bensenville, IL

2/15/74-6/20/90– Associate and Pastor, St. Mary parish, Mokena, IL

1/27/90 Letter from parishioner to Bishop Imesch saying Burnett is soon leaving St. Mary’s of Mokena parish. He was great with youth and young children. (119)

6/20/90-6/19/02 – Pastor, St. Peter & Paul, Naperville, IL

6/19/02 – Pastor, St. Raymond Cathedral, Joliet, IL

12/20/05 Memo re: report of abuse by Burnett when he was a priest at St. Mary in Mokena and the survivor was a second grade student at the school. Burnett abused him in the confessional. (236)

1/6/05 Memo to Sister Judith about messages from a survivor who reports abuse by Burnett when the survivor was in first through fourth grades at St. Mary school in Mokena. (238)

- 1/6/06 Memo from Sister Judith Davies about her conversation with a survivor of abuse by Burnett who is not represented by an attorney. Her notes indicate she is concerned with the statute of limitations because she asks when he made the connection between what happened to him and his problems. (240-242)
- 1/26/06 Memo re: allegations against Burnett saying that a nun who works with Burnett at the Cathedral of St. Raymond agreed to Bishop Imesch's request to monitor Burnett. (248)
- 2/2/06 Burnett takes polygraph test asking if he sexually abused a minor. The results were inconclusive and it was determined that Burnett should be re-examined on a later date. (783-784)
- 2/7/06 Press release re: allegations against Burnett note that Burnett denies the allegations and Imesch placed him on administrative leave until the matter is resolved. The Diocese's policy when allegations of abuse come in is to keep the priest in ministry until the allegation is deemed credible. (249)
- Revised press release says the Diocese learned of the allegation against Burnett before Christmas and he was placed on monitoring. (257)
- 6/19/06 Email from a survivor of abuse by Burnett asking recipient to publish his article in the bulletin about abuse by Burnett since an article by Burnett was previously published. (462)
- 12/19/06 Email from a survivor of abuse by Burnett detailing his abuse. (493)
- Undated Statement from Diocese of Joliet- the Review Committee has processed two allegations of abuse against Burnett and deemed the first not credible and there is not sufficient information to evaluate the claim. The Committee has not been able to determine the credibility of the second allegation. (553-554)
- 3/29/07 Letter from Bishop Sartain to parishioners at St. Raymond Cathedral about the allegations against Burnett and the Review Board's findings. Burnett will continue to remain out of ministry. (556-557)
- Undated Summary of allegations against Burnett when he was a priest at St. Charles Borromeo parish in Bensenville, IL. Boy was 9-12 years old when Burnett abused him. (614-616)