

Father James Janssen

More than 40 children abused in 40-year period

He used the YMCA to find, abuse children

Iowa Diocese knew of “morals charges,” but gave priest at least a dozen more assignments with kids

After retirement, worked at YMCA with blessing of diocese, no warning to community

Finally convicted of perjury and contempt

A fifty-year document trail of abuse shows how Davenport church officials knew that Father James Janssen sexually abused more than 40 children throughout his career and took little action to stop him.

Allegations against Janssen started in 1955. Janssen was suspected of abusing a child at a local YMCA, but the police did not pursue an investigation. A year later, Janssen was discovered in a YMCA handball court sexually abusing two boys. As a result, Janssen was put on a short-term leave.

Two years later in 1958, he was back in parishes and abusing. When asked about the abuse by Bishop Hayes, Janssen admitted his guilt. His suspension lasted less than a year. As soon as he was reinstated, he was discovered picking up boys and taking them swimming and to movies.

Bishop Hayes put Janssen on a new restrictions that the priest soon violated. Parents' continued to complain to the diocese about Janssen spending too much time with or abusing their sons.

Over the next 30 years, Janssen worked in parishes throughout Davenport, even serving on the priests' personnel board. He broke the rules of his restrictions repeatedly, and the parishes where he was assigned were never informed about Janssen's crimes.

In 1990, Janssen was put on indefinite leave of absence. He then retired in 1993. He wasn't done spending time with children, however. By 2000, he was working as a lifeguard and teacher at a Davenport YMCA. The Diocese of Davenport did not disclose Janssen's past to his new employer.

Janssen was laicized in 2004.

Janssen was convicted of perjury and contempt in conjunction with a 2003 civil sex abuse case filed against him.

It is believed that he is deceased.

TIMELINE OF DOCUMENTS - JAMES M. JANSSEN

3/19/48 – Ordained, Diocese of Davenport – Bp Ralph Hayes

4/08/48 – Assistant, St. Bridget's, Victor, IA

8/1948 – Assistant, St. Paul's Burlington, IA

5/18/50 – Assistant, St. Irenaeus, Clinton, IA

7/09/53 – Assistant, St. Joseph’s, East Pleasant Plain, IA; Assistant, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, Richland, IA; and Assistant, Immaculate Conception, Polishville, IA

8/16/53 – Whereabouts unknown, but spent time in Chicago and probably in Davenport

12/07/53 – Assistant, Sacred Heart, Newton, IA

10/14/55 Chief of Burlington Police called Fr. Corcoran inquiring about Fr. Janssen. He frequented the YMCA at Newton. Corcoran did not mention the precise matter at issue, but gathered it concerns a “morals charge.” Corcoran said he heard inklings of this a year ago, but dismissed it as having no foundation.

10/21/55 Letter from McCann to Hayes stating there have been some rumors and requests Hayes send an investigator to get the report directly from him.

11/02/56 The General Secretary of the Board of Directors found Fr. Janssen with 2 boys in the YMCA handball court doing a “very improper activity.” Fr. Janssen was prohibited from the YMCA and no other action was taken.

11/02/56 The General Secretary of the YMCA in Clinton, IA approached the General Secretary in Newton, IA asking if Fr. Janssen was actively engaged in parish work in Newton. He had been moved out of Clinton as a result of “homosexual tendencies.” This statement substantiates the action taken by the YMCA in Newton.

11/09/56 - Granted an indefinite leave of absence from the Diocese. Began studying at Loyola University, Chicago, IL

11/1956 – Resident of St. Isaac Jogues Rectory while attending Loyola University. Worked with the Boy Scouts and teenagers.

6/06/58 – Substitute Pastor, St. Michael’s, Holbrook, IA

8/18/58 Bp Hayes wrote to Fr. Janssen’s doctor at Loyola Center for Guidance stating that he based on his opinion, Fr. Janssen is “developing properly” so he has given Janssen a temporary assignment due to the absence of a pastor.

9/29/58 Reports of an inappropriate relationship with a 14 y.o. boy that started last Christmas. (J50)

10/01/58 Bp Hayes acknowledges receipt of the disclosures from 9/29. He plans to confront the party involved in the next day or so and take all necessary steps in the matter. (J51)

10/03/58 Bp. Hayes interviewed Fr. Janssen this afternoon and he confessed his guilt.

10/03/58 – Suspension ex informata conscientia issued by Bp Hayes – sent to Abbey of our Lady of New Melleray, Dubuque, IA to reside.

1/22/59 – Vicar Ecomone (administrator), St. Patrick’s, Delmar, IA with restrictions: 1) No contact with boy in IL; and 2) refrain from visiting in Clinton and Newton.

6/25/59 – Assistant, St. Mary’s, Davenport, IA

9/04/59 Bp. Hayes met with Janssen who has been serving as Assistant, St. Mary’s, Davenport, IA. Janssen admitted to having been picking up boys and taking them to Jergevery Park swimming pool and to outdoor movies. Given strict orders to never do this again and warning given that disobedience would lead to severe punishment. (J7)

12/28/59 Janssen witnessed with 2 boys near the statue between the Church and the Rectory following one of the recent Masses. He had his hand on one of the boy’s head and the other rubbing the front part of the boy’s body. Witness has heard rumors, but this is the first he saw first hand. (J8)

9/08/60 A mother is worried her son is spending too much time with Janssen. One specific incident included the mother going to the store and her son and Janssen sitting in the back seat. She found it odd that Janssen would have the boy sitting in his lap, especially on such a hot day. The mother is also worried because she thinks Jansen has access to a cottage somewhere. (J23)

9/10/60 Bp. Hayes places Janssen on “obedience” as follows: 1) forbidden to have boys ride in his car with him; 2) forbidden to take boys or accompany boys to any cabin or cottage; and 3) forbidden to organize, promote, or encourage dances of any kind for grade school or high school boys and girls. Consequences if rules are violated included ordering Janssen to sell his car and impose appropriate canonical penalties. (J27)

12/16/60 Janssen is reported to be having “relations” with a 14 y.o. boy from St. Mary’s school. Mother of the boy found her son and Janssen embracing in the kitchen last evening and when they left, she found a dirty note on the floor that she thinks was written by Janssen. Took her son for a ride alone in his car on 12/15/60.

12/19/60 Bp. Hayes interviewed Janssen. He denied that he acted improperly as accused by the mother or with any other boy in St. Mary’s parish. Admitted wrestling around with boys, but nothing more. Admitted disobeying Hayes’ orders not to take boys in his car. His excuse was that he did not think the order was fair. Hayes concludes that he does not know whether or not to believe Janssen – his past record is against him.

6/29/61 – Assistant, St. Joseph’s, Fort Madison, IA

11/05/66 – Administrator, St. Joseph’s, Fort Madison, IA

2/01/67 – Pastor, St. Joseph’s, Sugar Creek, IA

9/07/72– Pastor, St. Mary’s, Bryant, IA

1973 – Member of the Priests’ Senate

2/01/76 to 1/01/89 – Member of the Priests’ Personnel Board

10/11/79 – Co-Pastor, St. Anthony’s, Davenport, IA

7/24/80 – Diocesan Director/Chaplain of the Boy Scouts

10/21/80 – Pastor, Sts. Philip and James, Grand Mound, IA

8/15/90 – Indefinite Leave of absence for health reasons

11/05/91 to 2003 – Retired, St. Vincent Center, Davenport, IA

? to 4/15/96 – “Coverage” at Our Lady of Victory, Davenport, IA

? to 4/15/96 – Genesis Medical Center, Multiple Addictions Recovery Center, Davenport, IA

? to 8/30/00 – Lifeguard and teacher, Scott County Family Y and Davenport Outing Club, Davenport, IA

6/14/04 Request for laicization sent to Vatican

7/28/04 – Laicized

5/09/05 Janssen ordered by Scott County District Court to pay damages totaling \$1.89 million for sexual abuse case.