

# Reverend Robert F. Bower

## Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1932
YEAR OF DEATH:	
ORDINATION:	May 7, 1959

## Employment/Assignment History

5/23/1959 – 8/29/1964	Gannon University, Erie, PA
8/29/1964 – 6/03/1970	Parochial Vicar, Our Lady of the Lake, Edinboro, PA
6/03/1970 – 8/20/1993	Faculty, Newman Center, Edinboro University
8/29/1992 – 3/11/1999	Pastor, St Anthony, Cambridge Springs, PA
8/29/1992 – N/A	Resident, other, Private Residence, Edinboro, PA
8/31/1993 – 8/29/1998	Weekend Asst., Our Lady of the Lake, Edinboro, PA
3/11/1999 – 3/01/2001	Leave of Absence.
3/01/2001 – N/A	Special ministry, Weekend Asst. Johnsonburg, nursing home, Meadville, PA

## Summary

Reverend Robert Bower was a priest who served in campus ministry for over 40 years in the Diocese of Erie. In 1981, Bower was found to have collected child pornography photographs. Seventh grade children found these images in Bower's office while they served as janitors at the Edinboro University Newman Center. One of these children, now an adult, testified to the images before the Grand Jury. The witness testified that he and his friends found several photographs and pamphlets in Bower's office depicting children having sex with adults. He testified that he told his mother about it

The witness's mother began working for the Diocese in 1977. In 1981, she was fired two days after she and her three coworkers reported that Bower had a problem with child pornography. Another Diocesan employee testified before the Grand Jury that at approximately the same time the students found child pornography in Bower's office, she also found illegal pornography on his desk. She testified that, as Bower's secretary, she collected it and hid it away so none of the children who frequented Bower's office would come across it.

The four coworkers first took their findings to the Father Doleski. After they showed Doleski what was found in Bower's office, he suggested that they see Bishop Murphy. They requested a meeting with Murphy. Murphy delayed the meeting for weeks. Only after the women threatened to go to the media did Murphy finally agree to meet with them.

In their meeting with Murphy, the women explained that they did not wish to get Bower in trouble; rather, they wanted him to get help for his issues with child pornography. Both

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witnesses testified that Murphy preached to them and made them feel guilty to the point that they left the meeting in tears. They were told they were destroying Bower and the Church.

Two days after the meeting with the Bishop, one of the witnesses was notified that the Diocese had fired her without reason. Over the course of the next several years, she was denied jobs in the area and another witness was denied promotions inside the Diocese where she still worked. This witness testified that she kept the child pornography that she found that day in Bower's office for 17 years hoping that someday someone would believe her story. Both women were concerned that the influence of the Diocese could destroy their lives. Father Bower continued in ministry unabated.

In 1999, the Pennsylvania State Police received a telephone call from a local computer repair company. Technicians reported that they had a computer in their store with suspected child pornography on it. That computer belonged to Bower. The Grand Jury heard testimony from a former Pennsylvania State Trooper and from Bower himself confirming the presence of this child pornography on the computer. While Bower initially confessed to the Pennsylvania State Police, he minimized the significance of the material when he appeared before the Grand Jury and indicated he was unsure as to how the now-lost material came to be on his computer. Criminal charges were filed but were later dropped due to improper handling of the evidence.

During the timeframe of the 1999 investigation, the two aforementioned Diocesan employees took action. The women took their long-held collection of Bower's child pornography to the State Police. Both women reported that the State Police took the Bower material. The women hoped that their preservation of this evidence would result in some action or aid the existing case, but no additional charges were ever filed and the materials were destroyed.

Bower retired from active ministry in the early 2000's but continues to live on the campus of Edinboro University.

The Grand Jury found the testimony of the witnesses to be credible. It was Bower's own testimony, however, that most disturbed the Grand Jury. When the attorney for the Commonwealth asked Bower if he had ever had sexual contact with a child under the age of eighteen. Bower answered, "*What am I supposed to say?*" When the prosecutor persisted, Bower added, "*I'll go to jail.*"