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FEATURED TOP STORY

Accused ex-priest now listed at Punta Gorda church

By ANNE EASKER Staff Writer Aug 22, 2018



Sperber's Facebook page.



Timothy Sperber
Minister of Music

Tim has a Bachelor of Music Degree from Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey and Master of Divinity degree from Mt. St. Mary's University and Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland. He has been involved in church music for over 50 years, having begun playing professionally in the church at age 15. He is a skilled performer in voice, organ and piano and has built up choral programs in the various churches he has served. He welcomes you to join the adult choir, bell choir or to play an instrument.

A screen-grab from the website of the Congregational United Church of Christ in Punta Gorda before it was removed by the church.

A former priest named in the [grand jury report](#) on sexual abuse and cover-ups in the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania appears to be employed as the minister of music in the [Punta Gorda Congregational United Church of Christ](#).

Timothy Sperber, formerly of the Diocese of Harrisburg when the incident is purported to have occurred, left ministry in the Catholic church in 2000, according to the grand jury report.

The report states the Diocese of Harrisburg received a report in 2004 from a female alleging a priest abused her around 1979, when she was 9 or 10 years old. She was a student at the St. Joan of Arc school in Hershey, Pennsylvania, at the time.

Struggling with math, the principal assigned Sperber to tutor her, according to the report. Sperber was a part of the parish but not the school.

When she met with him, he allegedly molested her. She stated she begged to be removed from the school and tried her best to improve at math. In the new school year, when the principal told her she had to tutor with Sperber again, she tried to tell him Sperber “touched her in weird ways.”

The principal allegedly scolded her, saying, “How dare you make these terrible accusations. You are a demon child.”

He made the victim’s mother pick her up immediately, and she was placed in public school. Her mother reportedly refused to discuss the incident, not wanting anyone to think it was their fault.

Sperber transferred to the Archdiocese of Miami in 1992 to care for his sick mother, according to his profile in the grand jury report. He served at St. Gregory Church in Plantation for four years and St. Boniface Church in Pembroke Pines for two years.

Mary Ross Agosta, spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Miami, said Sperber came with a letter of suitability and there were no issues during the years he served in Florida.

“There’s no documentation in his file of inappropriate behavior or any complaints,” she said.

In 1998, Sperber took a leave of absence and wrote a letter to Bishop Nicholas Dattilo on Sept. 4, 2000, stating he would not return to ministry. He was suspended in October of 2000 for failing to appear for assignment.

A Timothy Sperber in Port Charlotte serves as the minister of music at the Congregational United Church of Christ in Punta Gorda. According to his Facebook page, he moved to Port Charlotte and was married in 2015. A Timothy Sperber married Floyd Stonier, both of Port Charlotte, in 2015, according to a *Sun* report. His Facebook page lists him as a 1978 graduate of Mount St. Mary’s University in Maryland, the second largest Catholic seminary in the United States.

Attempts to reach Sperber were unsuccessful.

The church refused to comment on the grand jury report but directed the *Sun* to Sperber's lawyer, Larry Davis, who practices in Hollywood, near Pembroke Pines. Davis, when contacted by the *Sun* Tuesday, said he would pass a message along to his client.

As of Tuesday, Sperber was still listed as a staff member on the Punta Gorda church's website.

Sperber is not the only priest in the grand jury report with local ties. Rev. Robert Brague served in the Diocese of Venice as Parochial Vicar of St. Ann's Parish in Naples from 1990 to 1991, and then at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Palmetto. He was allegedly transferred to the diocese after impregnating a teenage girl in Pennsylvania. He passed away in December 1997, according to the grand jury report.

A statement from the Diocese of Venice indicates they were unaware of any allegations of abuse.

"The Diocese is not aware, nor was it ever informed, of any abuse allegations in the Diocese of Venice pertaining to Father Brague. This information has been verified from the Diocesan archives," says a provided statement.

Other priests named in the report with Southwest Florida ties include Rev. Thomas McDonnell, who resides in Fort Myers; Father Sean Kerins, who resides with family in Naples; Father Robert E. Spangenberg, who died in Sarasota in 2003; and Father Raymond R. Rhoden, who died in Sarasota in 2006.

Of the 301 priests identified in the grand jury report as "predator priests" who sexually abused children while serving in ministry, only two can be prosecuted, which does not include Sperber, due to the statute of limitations. The grand jury recommended changes to Pennsylvania law, including eliminating the statute of limitations for sexual abuse of children, creating a civil window so older victims can sue for damages, clarifying penalties for a continuing failure to report child abuse, and specifying that Civil Confidentiality Agreements do not cover communications with law enforcement.

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More Information

To view the entire grand jury report, responses from the dioceses, and a video of some of the survivors of abuse, visit www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/