

Warnings from teachers, nuns, even a cop, didn't get Buffalo Diocese to remove priests

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## Warnings from teachers, nuns, even a cop, didn't get Buffalo Diocese to remove priests

Jay Tokasz  
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David M. Bialkowski stands outside St. John's Church in Buffalo on March 31, 2008. In a lawsuit filed in November 2020, the State Attorney General's Office revealed Buffalo Diocese files that show top diocese officials covered up allegations of inappropriate conduct against Bialkowski for years.

Buffalo News file photo

Jay Tokasz

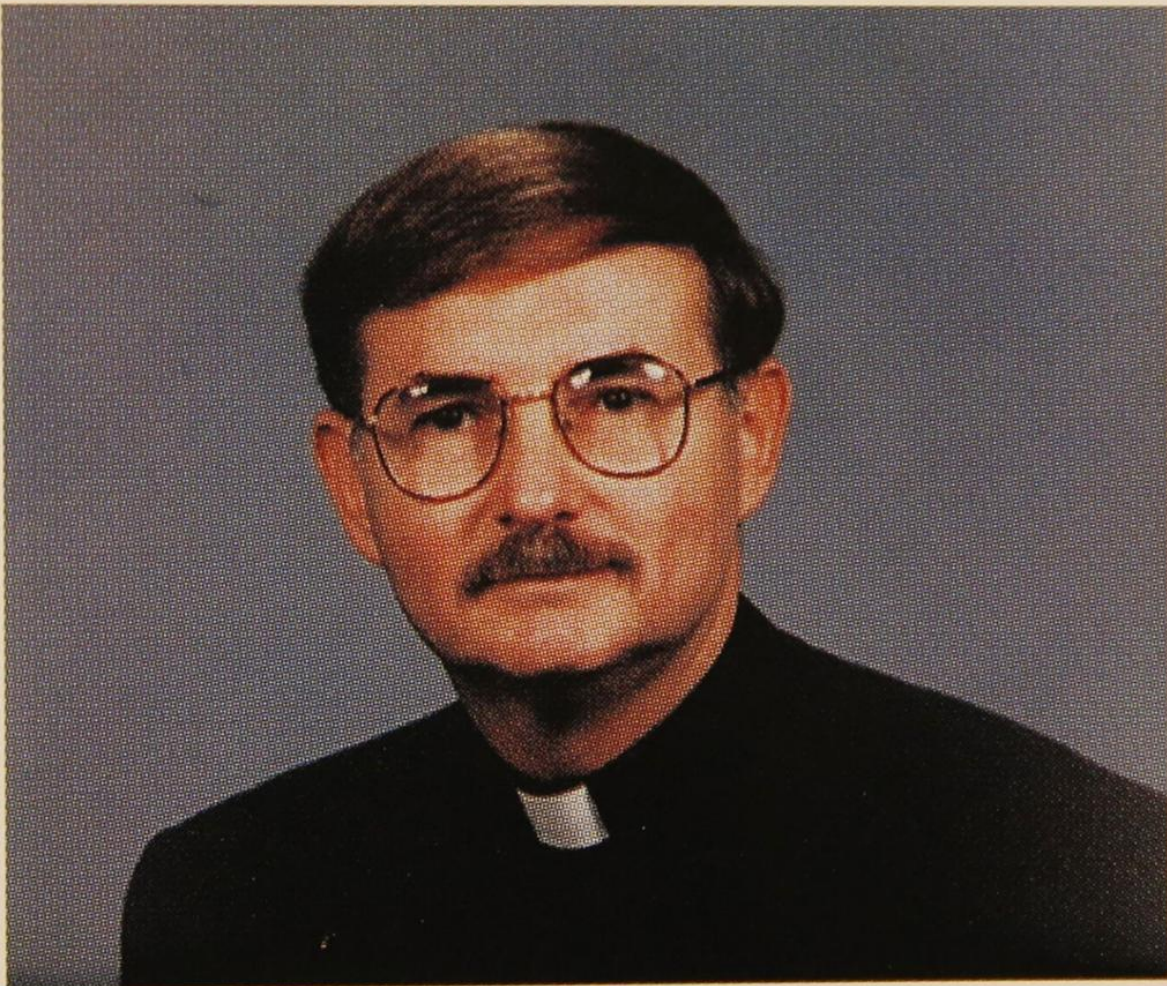
**T**op officials in the Buffalo Diocese failed to heed alarms about clergy misbehaving with minors, even when the warnings came from nuns, Catholic school teachers and other priests.

Diocese officials waited years, and sometimes decades, to separate accused priests from children and discipline them, according to diocese files revealed in a lawsuit filed last week by Attorney General Letitia James.

Such delays happened even when a Buffalo police captain approached diocese officials with concerns about a priest.

Take the case of the Rev. Dennis A. Fronczak. Two nuns wrote Bishop F...  
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in 1990 about Fronczak's disturbing propensity for tickling girls. Diocese officials  
acknowledged the seriousness of what the nuns brought to their attention. They noted  
in a 1991 memo the priest's "gravely imprudent and highly immature" behavior and a  
"pattern of activity that seems to be somewhat compulsive in nature."

Two years later, the principal of the Catholic parish school where Fronczak was  
associate pastor banned the priest from school functions due to alleged inappropriate  
conduct, including reports that he had rubbed a young girl's legs.



**Dennis Fronczak**

The diocese pulled Dennis Fronczak without explanation from Our Lady of Pompeii parish in 2015. Kristen Lovullo, the wife of Arizona Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo, accused him in a story The News published June 18, 2018, of fondling her when she was 9 to 12 years old at St. Stephen's School on Grand Island. The diocese announced 10 days later that its investigation substantiated allegations of sexual misconduct against Fronczak.

By (1995 Priests' Pictorial Directory)

And yet it wasn't until after the diocese had received eight separate allegations about sexually inappropriate behavior with girls that Fronczak finally was pulled from a parish in 2015.

In 2018, an Arizona woman told The News that Fronczak had fondled her repeatedly in the 1990s, when she was 9 and attending St. Stephen parish school on Grand Island, where Fronczak was associate pastor. The abuse continued for several years, the woman told The News.

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Fronczak was accused in a 2019 lawsuit of repeatedly molesting a 10-year-girl at St. John the Baptist parish in Lockport, starting in 1986.

Fronczak continues to be a priest. His case has not yet been adjudicated by the Vatican.

Canon lawyer Robert J.B. Flummerfelt said that church law prohibits him and Fronczak from publicly discussing the case.

"However, I can state unequivocally that Father Dennis Fronczak comp  
denies having committed any sexual abuse of any minor at any time," said  
Flummerfelt.

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Fronczak's personnel files were among hundreds of diocese documents subpoenaed by the State Attorney General's Office in an investigation launched two years ago. Excerpts from some of those documents were revealed for the first time in court papers last week. They show a pattern of diocese leaders ignoring warnings about problem priests and shielding them from public accountability for their alleged crimes.

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The Attorney General's report redacted the names of the priests in the Buffalo News independently verified their identities through other sources.

Fronczak wasn't the only priest whose behaviors were brought to the attention of chancery leaders, only to be left uninvestigated for years. Until recently, diocese officials didn't forward any cases of alleged or suspected sexual abuse by priests to criminal authorities.

"The diocese thought it could fix this, and it was completely unable to fix it," said attorney Steve Boyd, who represents 300 plaintiffs in Child Victims Act lawsuits against the diocese and area Catholic parishes.

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Diocese officials figured that they could counsel or treat a priest out of criminal conduct, he added.

"And so they closed ranks, and that's the heart of their negligent behavior," said Boyd. "I don't think they ever intended for more people to be injured, but they were convinced that they were doing the right thing, and they just weren't. The right thing, the human thing, would have been to call the police and let the legal system fix it."

Bishop Edward B. Scharfenberger, who had been leading the Buffalo Diocese as apostolic administrator, acknowledged in a recent letter that it has taken too long for church authorities "to grasp the true nature of these horrific acts against children for

what they are – crimes that require the full weight of justice.”  
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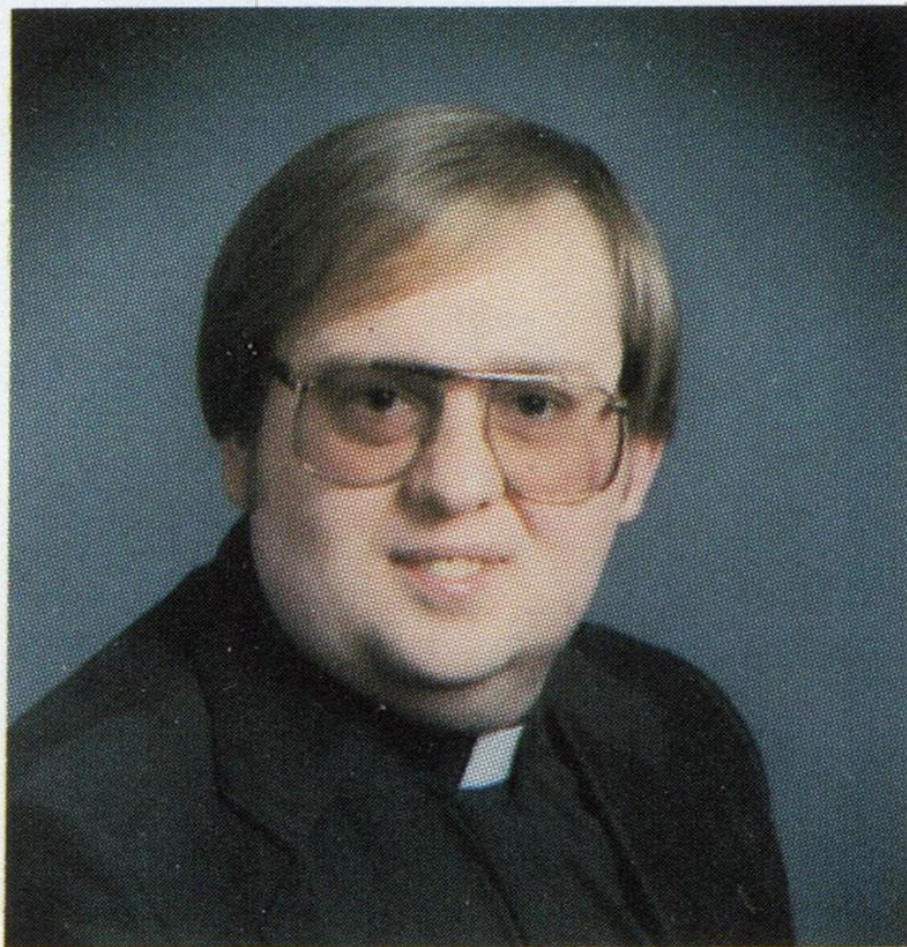
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“Preventing scandal was often the overriding concern,” Scharfenberger said in a letter to The News sent shortly before the Vatican on Tuesday named Bishop Michael W. Fisher as the 15th bishop of Buffalo. “We know now that this was an unconscionable failing and tragic injustice to those harmed.”

Scharfenberger also maintained that the diocese operates much differently now, immediately alerting law enforcement of an allegation of abuse of a minor. The diocese suspends an accused priest from public ministry while an outside investigator probes into the allegations, and the case is reviewed by a board of lay people who are not employed by the diocese, he added.

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**Hajduk, John P.**

John P. Hajduk was one of the 42 priests publicly identified March 20, 2018 by Bishop Richard J. Malone as having been accused of sexual misconduct with a minor. The diocese did not release any information about the allegation against him.

By (1983 Priests' Pictorial Directory)

**Rev. John Hajduk**



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In 1979, a group of Catholic school teachers met with two high-ranking diocese officials to discuss their concerns and “anxieties” about the Rev. John P. Hajduk, according to files cited in the Attorney General’s investigative report. Hajduk was assigned to Precious Blood Church in Angola, which operated an elementary school.

Hajduk remained in parishes for 15 years after teachers expressed concerns to the diocese. He's now accused of molesting several children in the 1970s and 1980s.

A Child Victims Act lawsuit filed in July alleges Hajduk molested a boy who was 14 or 15 in 1977, when the priest was assigned to Precious Blood.

Diocese files also show that a man wrote to the diocese in 2005 to complain that Hajduk gave him drugs and alcohol and repeatedly raped him for three years, starting in 1978 when the complainant was 12.

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Hajduk threatened to kill the complainant if he disclosed the abuse, according to a letter in Hajduk's file. The man told diocese officials that he had attempted suicide several times and became addicted to drugs and alcohol. Then Bishop Edward U. Kmiec apologized and offered counseling to the man. But the Attorney General's report found that the diocese didn't investigate his claims.

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After Most Precious Blood, the diocese sent Hajduk to Holy Family Church in Buffalo, where he spent seven years.

Two Child Victims Act lawsuits filed in 2019 allege Hajduk abused boys during his time at Holy Family.

Hajduk was appointed pastor of St. Mary parish in Cattaraugus in 1991. After 1994, he no longer was assigned to parishes, according to the diocesan directories.

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Hajduk, 70, lives in a skilled nursing facility in Alexandria, Va., and could not be reached to comment.

### **Rev. David Bialkowski**

Not even Buffalo police could get diocese officials to take seriously concerns about the Rev. David W. Bialkowski, the Attorney General's report found.

The diocese's files on Bialkowski included Monsignor Robert Cunningham's documentation of a call he received in 1995 from a Buffalo police captain. Cunningham was the Buffalo Diocese's vicar general, or second-in-command, and later went on to become bishop of Ogdensburg and then Syracuse.

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The captain alerted Cunningham that officers had twice found a 16-year-old boy with Bialkowski in the priest's car at night. Bialkowski wasn't charged with a crime or even a traffic violation.

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"There was nothing he had done wrong," Cunningham wrote. "But, the police were concerned about a priest being parked in a car with a 16-year-old boy twice on one night."

When Bishop Head confronted Bialkowski, the priest maintained he was teaching the teen how to drive.

Diocese officials already had been notified in 1994 about "an over familiarity" between Bialkowski and two teenagers. Bialkowski's own former pastor "indicated that there is a rumor ... that (Bialkowski) is having a love affair with the two teens," according to diocese files.

In the late 1990s, a priest also warned Auxiliary Bishop Edward M. Grosz that Bialkowski took teenage boys into his bedroom.

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Despite the red flags, Bialkowski was promoted in 2006 to pastor of St. John Gualbert Church in Cheektowaga, where he stayed until being removed from ministry in 2011 due to a “series of allegations made against him,” according to a diocese file. The file said a diocese review board had found that conduct reported by a young man about Bialkowski had constituted "grooming." The man said Bialkowski stayed overnight in a New York City hotel room with him when he was 13. Bialkowski said the man was 18 at the time, according to diocese files.

Two Child Victims Act lawsuits filed in 2019 accused Bialkowski of sexual abuse of minors during his time at St. John Gualbert.

Bialkowski denied that he sexually abused any child. He also denied that he had tried to "groom" a child for sex.

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"No, no, not at all. Never," he said.

He said he hasn't been given an opportunity to respond to allegations in the Attorney General's report or the two lawsuits. Bialkowski is not named as a defendant in either lawsuit, so he was not served with a summons to respond to the complaint.

"There was no due process about any of this at all," said Bialkowski.

The teenagers referred to in the AG's report, as well as their parents, told diocese officials that no inappropriate physical or sexual conduct had taken place, said Bialkowski.

"The Attorney General's report acknowledges that it did not really investigate any of this, right? I mean that's what I read, right?" he said.

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The report's footnotes indicate that the Attorney General did not independently investigate claims laid out in the diocese's files.

A Cheektowaga man sued the diocese last August alleging Bialkowski repeatedly abused him around 1999-2000, when he was an 8-year-old parishioner of St. John Gualbert Church.

The lawsuit alleges the abuse happened twice a week for eight months of counseling sessions with Bialkowski.

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Bialkowski said he does not know the man who is suing and has never counseled children.

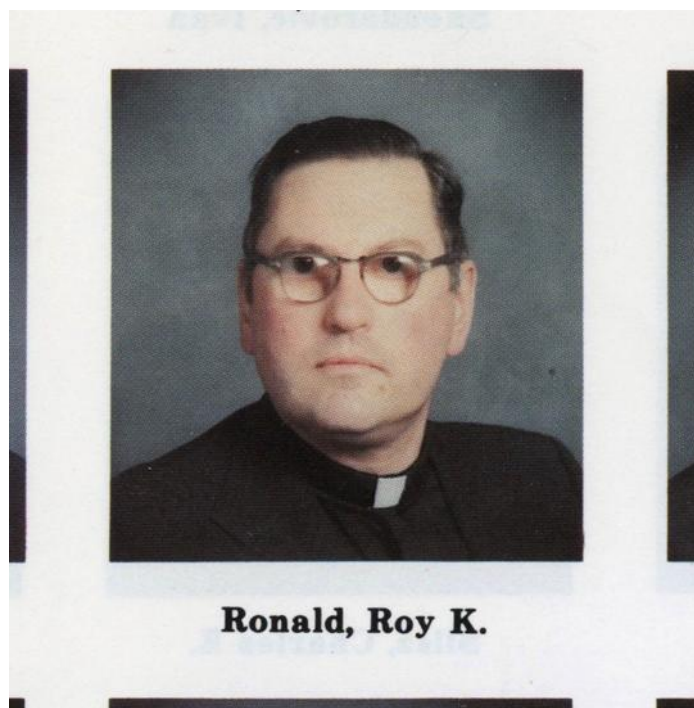
"Maybe he was counseled by someone else and got mixed up. I don't know," he said.

The other lawsuit was by an anonymous plaintiff and did not include any details about the alleged abuse.

### **Rev. Roy Ronald**

A fellow priest reported the Rev. Roy K. Ronald to chancery officials in 1995, according to diocese files in the Attorney General's report.

The files include a February 1995 memo from Monsignor Robert Zapfel, who was vice chancellor, to Bishop Head and to Cunningham explaining



that the priest reported Ronald had sexually abused five siblings from the same family around 1984.

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Roy K. Ronald was one of the 42 priests identified March 20, 2018 by Bishop Gene

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Malone as having been accused of sexual misconduct with a minor. The diocese did not release any information about the allegation against him.

By (1983 Priests' Pictorial Directory)

The memo also said the reporting priest “agreed to relay to his sources”

that the diocese would investigate “if a first-hand witness came forward.” Nothing in the files received by the Attorney General indicated that the diocese did any investigation of the claims or that the case was resolved.

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The diocese put Ronald on sick leave in 1995, and he was ordered not to say Masses in public. Nonetheless, Cunningham granted Ronald permission to celebrate at least two Masses, including one for 70 adults and teenagers traveling with Ronald’s relatives to a work camp in Buffalo and another one alongside Bishop Henry J. Mansell for a parish anniversary, diocese files showed.

The diocese allowed Ronald to retire in 1998 with a full pension and an opportunity to return to ministry if his health improved, according to the files.

In retirement, Ronald presented himself publicly as a priest and officiated at Masses.

The public wasn’t informed until 2018, five years after Ronald’s death, that he had been credibly accused of sexually abusing a minor.

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Four plaintiffs have sued the diocese and some of its parishes, accusing Ronald of molesting them. The abuses alleged in their Child Victims Act complaints span from 1962 to 1986.

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### Jay Tokasz

Reporter

My byline has run in the Ithaca Journal, USA Today, the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle and the New York Times. I have been a staff reporter at The Buffalo News since 2002 and currently am part of the watchdog team.