

ROBERT DENSMORE

I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Densmore was born in 1932. (B1030). He was ordained a priest on December 20, 1961. Id. The Diocese limited his ministry in 1993, after receiving a complaint that Densmore had sexually assaulted a minor. There is no evidence that Densmore abuse any other children after the first complaint came to the Diocese attention. The Diocese, however, did not revoke Densmore's ministry entirely until the initiation of the State's investigation of the Diocese in February 2002.

II. ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS AGAINST DENSMORE

A. Sexual Misconduct In New London

The first known incident of Densmore engaging in sexual abuse with a minor occurred sometime between 1972 and 1974. (B1036). Densmore was assigned to Our Lady of Fatima parish in New London at the time. (B1030). John Doe X was an altar boy for Densmore. Doe X was between 11 and 13 years old. He reported that one Saturday afternoon, he arrived early to serve the 5 o'clock mass. He showed up for mass wearing shorts, sneakers, and no socks. Densmore slapped him across the face and told him that he should go to the rectory and get a pair of socks. Then Densmore said, "No, better yet I will take you over." When they went into the bedroom in the rectory, Densmore pulled down Doe X's shorts and spanked him 5-6 times. Each time, Densmore fondled Doe X's buttocks. Densmore then gave Doe X a pair of socks and admonished him, "you don't go into God's house without socks on." Doe X quit being an altar boy after that experience. Doe X did not report this conduct to anyone until he read the names of the priests in the newspaper earlier this year. (B1036).

John Doe XI also reported the he was sexually abused by Densmore at Our Lady of Fatima parish. This abuse occurred between 1972 and 1974, while Doe XI was between 6 and 8 years old. Doe XI had four brothers and Densmore would often babysit them. During these occasions, Densmore would give Doe XI and his brothers a bath. Densmore would then fondle the genitals of Doe XI and his brothers. When Doe XI and his brother slept overnight with Densmore, Densmore would make them sleep in the same bed as him. (B5005). When they slept with Densmore he would fondle them. Doe XI and his brother often tried not to be the person who slept closest to Densmore because this person would most likely get fondled. The abuse ended for Doe XI when he began staying over with a neighbor and he would no longer stay with Densmore. Doe XI and his mother first reported the abuse in 1993, when Doe XI was 26 years old. (B5006). The circumstances of that report will be discussed in further detail below.

B. Sexual Misconduct in Charlestown

Jane Doe was a parishioner at St. Catherine's parish in Charlestown in the mid-1980s. (B4731). Fr. Robert Densmore was the assistant pastor at that church and befriended Jane Doe's family. (B4731). At some point, Jane Doe began to suspect that there was inappropriate contact between Densmore and her son. At first, she contacted the pastor of the parish. (B4732). He put her in contact with Msgr. Francis Christian. (B4732). On Oct. 7, 1985, Jane Doe reported to Christian that Densmore had a homosexual experience with her son. She reported that his first sexual experience with Densmore was two years earlier. When Christian interviewed Densmore about Jane Doe's accusations, Densmore admitted his homosexual experience with Jane Doe's son. (B474). He also admitted to smoking marijuana and drinking too much. (B474).

Although Jane Doe's son was 19 years old when his mother reported his sexual contact with Densmore, he was only 17 at the time of his first sexual contact with Densmore. (B4731). It is unclear whether Jane Doe conveyed her son's age to Fr. Christian when she reported the matter in 1985.

During his meeting with Fr. Christian, Densmore "indicated that he understood that he had compromised his situation in Charlestown and it would be necessary for him to resign the parish." (B475). After Jane Doe's complaint, Densmore took a leave of absence. He was reassigned to hospital ministry and "limited weekend ministry" in St. Christopher's parish in Nashua. (B1030; B5721). There was absolutely no limit on his parish ministry. In fact, the letter of assignment to Fr. Karl Dowd reads: "He will . . . provide you with weekend assistance at Saint Christopher's and be willing to help in whatever other ways his primary ministry makes possible." (B5722).

In December 1985, the Bishop attempted to require Densmore to attend counseling at St. Luke's Institute. (B476). This counseling was to focus on Densmore's alcohol problems, although the Diocese acknowledged that his homosexual conduct presented a problem for his reassignment. (B476). There was absolutely no indication about whether Densmore's conduct involved sexual contact with minors. Densmore refused to be admitted for in-patient treatment to St. Luke's Institute. The Bishop reluctantly allowed him to see Dr. Henry Guertin-Ouellette. (B476).

Until 1993, none of the subsequent medical evaluations and status reports refer to Densmore's sexual problem. Although Jane Doe first reported the sexual contact between her son and Densmore in 1985, it does not appear that she clearly identified her son as a minor at the time the contact occurred. In 1993, the Diocese received a second report of sexual misconduct by Densmore.

III. DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO SUBSEQUENT REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

In February 1993, John Doe XI and his mother reported to Christian that Densmore had sexually abused Doe XI and his younger brother when they were very young (4-8 years old).

(B483). As indicated above, Doe XI was 26 years old at the time he reported this conduct. Christian wrote in a memorandum dated February 24, 1993, that “[i]t appears to me that with the appropriate reimbursement for his counseling expenses, and as long as he is satisfied with the steps the Diocese has taken, the Diocese and Father Densmore may not be in danger of any civil or criminal liability. [Doe XI] is, however, an angry and troubled young man who, in my estimation, might easily be pushed over the edge.” (B483-84)

When Christian confronted Densmore about Doe XI’s accusations, Densmore denied the abuse. Christian told Densmore that Doe XI believed Densmore had admitted to the abuse. Christian concluded that “any change in [Densmore’s] story in [Doe XI]’s eyes would be extremely detrimental to him. He understands this, even though he continues to protest that these things did not happen. Father Densmore has volunteered to pay for the cost of the counseling involved, even though he recognizes that this is a kind of admission of guilt, but he also understands that not to pay would be a denial of guilt which [Doe XI] would not readily accept.” (B484).

Despite Densmore’s denial that he abused Doe XI, Christian wrote to Doe XI on March 11, 1993, informing Doe XI that Densmore had admitted the conduct. Christian wrote that Densmore “recognizes his responsibility [sic] and sincerely wishes and prays for your forgiveness and your recovery.” He informed Doe XI that Densmore would not be allowed to return to parish ministry and that he was limited to hospital or institutional ministry. (B485).

Christian offered to pay for Doe XI’s counseling costs on a condition that Doe XI sign a release and confidentiality agreement. (B482, B486). Doe XI responded:

Having asked me (as a condition of the ‘Agreement and Release’) to ‘keep the nature of any discussions . . . confidential’ has made quite clear to me your neglect to appreciate what happened to me.

Some twenty years ago Father Densmore said to me ‘. . . this is what the big boys do . . .’ and made it easy for me to understand that I need not tell anyone. This in a sense was a ‘code of silence’ I lived with.

I know all to [sic] painfully how destructive silence is. Silence empowers an abuser and weakens the abused.

My silence has ended!

I will not sign an ‘Agreement and Release’ requesting I be silent.

(B488).

Christian responded to Doe XI’s letter, urging him to reconsider his refusal to sign the confidentiality agreement:

. . . Making those problems public would destroy [Densmore's] ability to contribute further and would affect his problems. Your coming forward has been helpful and we trust has helped you. Should Father Densmore ever engage in destructive behavior, we would want you to come forward with that information, either to us or to the appropriate authorities. However, going public now with the events about which we have corresponded would not only put you in a compromising position due to the publicity, but would also jeopardize Fr. Densmore's limited ministry, to no constructive end.

It is for these reasons alone that we sought the confidentiality agreement. Should you wish to discuss these more fully, I would be pleased to sit down with you.

(B489). John Doe XI refused to sign the confidentiality agreement or settle with the Diocese at that time.

Prior to John Doe XI's allegations, Densmore had received substantial in-patient and out-patient therapy for his alcohol abuse. In 1993, the Diocese inquired whether sexual issues had been addressed during these counseling sessions. St. Luke's Institute responded that Densmore had covered sexual issues during his counseling. (B455-57). While St. Luke's recommended some after-care treatment regarding the sexual issues after the Diocese's 1993 inquiry, the therapists did not recommend any limitation on Densmore's ministry. (B455-57). According to Diocesan records, Densmore's therapy ended in 1995. (B473).

Densmore remained in hospital ministry until May 12, 2000, when he retired from full-time active ministry. (B5724). It is unclear whether he continued to engage in weekend ministry after this. His priestly faculties, however, were not revoked until February 15, 2002.

IV. CONCLUSION

Three victims reported that Fr. Robert Densmore had engaged in sexual misconduct with minors. Some of the accusations were reported to the Diocese. The Diocese did not immediately remove Fr. Densmore from parish ministry. In 1993, the Diocese limited Fr. Densmore's ministry to hospital or other institutional settings, but his priestly faculties were not revoked until February 15, 2002. There is, however, no evidence that Densmore engaged in sexual misconduct with a minor after the Diocese first learned of Densmore's misconduct. Accordingly, this matter would not have provided a basis to pursue criminal charges against the Diocese.