

GIANFORCARO LAW
GREGORY G. GIANFORCARO, ESQ.
NJ ID No. 024551988
80 South Main Street
Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865
Telephone: (908) 859-2200
Facsimile: (908) 859-3441
gianforcarolaw@msn.com

JEFF ANDERSON & ASSOCIATES P.A.
JEFFREY R. ANDERSON, ESQ.
NJ ID No. 311052019
TRUSHA GOFFE, ESQ.
NJ ID No. 305772019
RITA GRIBKO, ESQ.
NJ ID No. 015041994
NAHID SHAIKH, ESQ.
NJ ID No. 112002014
505 Thornall Street, Suite 405
Edison, NJ 08837
Telephone: (609) 344-3847
Facsimile: (651) 297-6543
jeff@andersonadvocates.com
trusha@andersonadvocates.com
rita@andersonadvocates.com
nahid@andersonadvocates.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff

JA/GG DOE 35, representing one (1)
plaintiff,

Plaintiff,

v.

**THE DIOCESE OF TRENTON; DIOCESE
OF METUCHEN a/k/a THE ROMAN
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF METUCHEN
a/k/a THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP
OF METUCHEN; CHRIST THE KING;
CHRIST THE REDEEMER PARISH; ABC
ENTITY**, its priests, reverends, teachers,
deacons, directors, officers, employees, agents,
servants, representatives and/or volunteers, is a
fictitious name of an entity believed to have
employed Fr. Joseph R. Punderson; and **JOHN
DOES 1-5**, individually, and in their capacity
as a former and/or current priest, reverend,
teacher, deacon, director, officer, employee,
agent, servant, representative and/or volunteer
of the defendants, are persons whose identities
are unknown to Plaintiff,

Defendants.

: SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY
: LAW DIVISION - MERCER COUNTY

:
: DOCKET NO.: _____

:
: CIVIL ACTION

:
: COMPLAINT, JURY DEMAND AND
: DESIGNATION OF TRIAL COUNSEL

Plaintiff, JA/GG DOE 35, by and through Plaintiff's attorneys, by way of Complaint against the Defendants, states and alleges as follows:

PARTIES

1. At all times material to this Complaint, Plaintiff resided in the State of New Jersey. Plaintiff is proceeding under a pseudonym pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2A:61B-1(f).

2. At all times material, Defendant The Diocese of Trenton was and continues to be an organization or entity which includes, but is not limited to, civil corporations, decision making entities, officials, and representatives/agents/employees, authorized to conduct business and conducting business in the State of New Jersey with its principal place of business at 701 Lawrenceville Road, Trenton, New Jersey 08648. The Diocese of Trenton was established in approximately 1881. Later, the Diocese of Trenton created a corporation called the Diocese of Trenton to conduct some of its affairs. The Diocese of Trenton operates its affairs as both a corporate entity and as an organization named the Diocese of Trenton, with the Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton as the top official. Both of these entities and all other corporations and entities controlled by the Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton are included in this Complaint as being the Diocese of Trenton. The Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton is given authority over all matters within the Diocese of Trenton as a result of his position. The Diocese of Trenton functions as a business by engaging in numerous revenue producing activities and soliciting money from its members in exchange for its services.

3. At all times material, Defendant The Diocese of Metuchen a/k/a the Roman Catholic Diocese of Metuchen a/k/a the Roman Catholic Bishop of Metuchen (hereinafter "Diocese of Metuchen") was and continues to be an organization or entity which includes, but is not limited to, civil corporations, decision making entities, officials, and employees, authorized to conduct business and conducting business in the State of New Jersey with its principal place of

business at 146 Metlars Lane, Piscataway, New Jersey 08854.

4. The Diocese of Metuchen was created in approximately 1981 from the Diocese of Trenton. The Diocese of Metuchen operates its affairs as both a corporate entity and as an organization known as the Diocese of Metuchen. Both of these entities and all other affiliated corporations and entities controlled by the Bishop of Metuchen are included in this Complaint as the “Diocese of Metuchen.” The Diocese of Metuchen functions as a business by engaging in numerous revenue producing activities and soliciting money from its members in exchange for its services.

5. Diocese of Trenton and the Diocese of Metuchen are collectively referred to as “Dioceses.”

6. The Dioceses have several programs which seek out the participation of children in the Dioceses’ activities. The Dioceses, through their officials, have control over those activities involving children. The Dioceses have the power to appoint, supervise, monitor and terminate each person working with children within the Dioceses.

7. At all times material, Christ the King was an organization authorized to conduct business in the State of New Jersey, with its principal place of business at 211 Louis Street, Manville, NJ 08835. Christ the King includes, but is not limited to, the Christ the King corporation and any other organizations and/or entities operating under the same or similar name with the same or similar principal place of business.

8. At all times material, Christ the King was under the direct authority, control, and province of Defendant Dioceses and the Bishops of the Dioceses. Defendant Christ the King includes any school affiliated with Christ the King. At all times material, the parish was under the direct authority, control, and province of The Diocese and the Bishops of the Dioceses. At all times material, Defendants Christ the King and Dioceses owned, operated, managed, maintained,

and controlled Christ the King School.

9. At all times material, Christ the Redeemer Parish (“Christ the Redeemer”) was and continues to be an organization authorized to conduct business and conducting business in the State of New Jersey, with its principal place of business at 211 Louis Street, Manville, NJ 08835. Upon information and belief, Christ the King was absorbed into Christ the Redeemer in a de facto merger or series of de facto mergers. Upon information and belief Christ the Redeemer continued the missions and ministry of Christ the King, and remained under the direct authority, control and province of the Dioceses and the Bishops of the Dioceses after the merger(s). Upon information and belief Christ the King ceased ordinary business operations as soon as possible after the transaction(s), and Christ the Redeemer assumed Christ the King liabilities ordinarily necessary for the uninterrupted continuation of Christ the King operations and business with a continuity of management, personnel, physical location and general business operation. Christ the Redeemer includes, but is not limited to, the parish corporation and any other organizations and/or entities operating under the same or similar name with the same or similar principal place of business.

10. At all times material, Christ the Redeemer was under the direct authority, control, and province of the Dioceses and the Bishop of the Dioceses. Defendant Christ the Redeemer includes any school affiliated with Christ the Redeemer. At all times material, the parish was under the direct authority, control, and province of the Dioceses and the Bishop of the Dioceses. At all times material, Defendants Christ the Redeemer and Diocese owned, operated, managed, maintained, and controlled the Christ the Redeemer School.

11. For purposes of this Complaint, Defendants Christ the King and Christ the Redeemer are referred to collectively as “Christ the King.”

12. The Dioceses and Christ the King are collectively referred to as “Defendants” herein.

13. Whenever reference is made to any Defendant entity, such reference includes that entity, its parent companies, subsidiaries, affiliates, predecessors, and successors. In addition, whenever reference is made to any act, deed, or transaction of any entity, the allegation means that the entity engaged in the act, deed, or transaction by or through its officers, directors, agents, employees, or representatives while they were actively engaged in the management, direction, control, or transaction of the entity's business or affairs.

14. The Defendant ABC ENTITY, its priests, reverends, teachers, deacons, directors, officers, employees, agents, servants, representatives and/or volunteers, is a fictitious name of an entity believed to have employed Fr. Joseph R. Punderson.

15. The Defendant JOHN DOES 1-5, individually, and in their capacity as a former and/or current priest, reverend, teacher, deacon, director, officer, employee, agent, servant, representative and/or volunteer of the defendants, are persons whose identities are unknown to Plaintiff.

JURISDICTION, VENUE AND NEW LAWS

16. This Court has jurisdiction over this action as Defendants' principal places of business are in New Jersey and because the unlawful conduct complained of herein occurred in New Jersey.

17. Venue is proper in this county pursuant to New Jersey Court Rule 4:3-2 because this County is the principal place of business of Defendant Diocese. In addition, events that are relevant to this action occurred within this County.

18. Recently, New Jersey passed into law Bills S477 and A3648, which became effective December 1, 2019. These new laws extend the statute of limitations in civil actions for sexual abuse claims, as well as created a two (2) year window for parties to bring previously time-barred actions based on sexual abuse. The new laws also expand the categories of potential

defendants in civil actions and permit retroactive application of standards of liability to past acts of abuse for which liability did not previously exist. The said new laws apply to the parties herein.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

19. At all times material, Fr. Joseph R. Punderson (“Fr. Punderson”) was a Roman Catholic cleric employed by the Dioceses and Christ the King. Fr. Punderson remained under the direct supervision, employ, and control of Defendants.

20. Defendants placed Fr. Punderson in positions where Fr. Punderson had access to and worked with children as an integral part of his work.

21. Plaintiff was raised in a devout Roman Catholic family and attended Christ the King in Manville, NJ in the Diocese. Plaintiff and Plaintiff’s family came in contact with Fr. Punderson as an agent and representative of Defendants, and at Christ the King.

22. Plaintiff participated in youth activities and/or church activities at Christ the King. Plaintiff, therefore, developed great admiration, trust, reverence, and respect for the Roman Catholic Church, including Defendants and their agents, including Fr. Punderson.

23. During and through these activities, Plaintiff, as a minor and vulnerable child, was dependent on Defendants and Fr. Punderson. Defendants had custody and/or supervision of Plaintiff and accepted the entrustment of Plaintiff and, therefore, had responsibility for Plaintiff and authority over Plaintiff.

24. From approximately 1977 to 1979, when Plaintiff was approximately 13 to 15 years old, Fr. Punderson engaged in unpermitted sexual contact with Plaintiff.

25. Plaintiff’s relationship to Defendants and Fr. Punderson, as a vulnerable child, parishioner, student and participant in church activities, was one in which Plaintiff was subject to the ongoing influence of Defendants and Fr. Punderson.

26. The culture of the Catholic Church over Plaintiff created pressure on Plaintiff not

to report the abuse Plaintiff suffered.

27. Defendants knew or should have known that Fr. Punderson was a danger to children before Fr. Punderson sexually assaulted Plaintiff.

28. Prior to the sexual abuse of Plaintiff, Defendants learned or should have learned that Fr. Punderson was not fit to work with children. Defendants, by and through their agents, servants and/or employees, became aware, or should have become aware of Fr. Punderson's propensity to commit sexual abuse and of the risk to Plaintiff's safety. At the very least, Defendants knew or should have known that they did not have sufficient information about whether or not their leaders and people working at Catholic institutions within the Dioceses were safe.

29. Defendants knew or should have known that there was a risk of child sex abuse for children participating in Catholic programs and activities within the Diocese. At the very least, Defendants knew or should have known that they did not have sufficient information about whether or not there was a risk of child sex abuse for children participating in Catholic programs and activities within the Diocese.

30. Defendants knew or should have known that Defendants had numerous agents who had sexually molested children. Defendants knew or should have known that child molesters have a high rate of recidivism. Defendants knew or should have known that some of the leaders and people working in Catholic institutions within the Dioceses were not safe and that there was a specific danger of child sex abuse for children participating in their youth programs.

31. Instead, Defendants negligently deemed that Fr. Punderson was fit to work with children and/or that any previous problems were fixed or cured and/or that Fr. Punderson would not sexually assault children and/or that Fr. Punderson would not injure children.

32. Defendants owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care because they had superior

knowledge about the risk that Fr. Punderson posed to Plaintiff, the risk of abuse in general in their programs and/or the risks that their facilities posed to minor children.

33. Defendants owed a duty to Plaintiff to protect Plaintiff from harm because Defendants' actions created a foreseeable risk of harm to Plaintiff. As a vulnerable child participating in the programs and activities Defendants offered to minors, Plaintiff was a foreseeable victim. As a vulnerable child who Fr. Punderson had access to through Defendants' facilities and programs, Plaintiff was a foreseeable victim.

34. Defendants also breached their duty to Plaintiff by actively maintaining and employing Fr. Punderson in a position of power and authority through which Fr. Punderson had access to children, including Plaintiff, and power and control over children, including Plaintiff.

35. Each Defendant breached its duties to Plaintiff. Defendants failed to use ordinary care in determining whether their facilities were safe and/or determining whether they had sufficient information to represent their facilities as safe. Defendants' breach of their duties include, but are not limited to: failure to protect Plaintiff from a known danger, failure to have sufficient policies and procedures to prevent child sex abuse, failure to properly implement policies and procedures to prevent child sex abuse, failure to take reasonable measures to make sure that policies and procedures to prevent child sex abuse were working, failure to adequately inform families and children of the risks of child sex abuse, failure to investigate risks of child sex abuse, failure to properly train the employees at institutions and programs within Defendants' geographical confines, failure to train parishioners within Defendants' geographical confines about the risk of sexual abuse, failure to have any outside agency test their safety procedures, failure to protect the children in their programs from child sex abuse, failure to adhere to the applicable standard of care for child safety, failure to investigate the amount and type of information necessary to represent the institutions, programs, leaders and people as safe, failure to train their

employees properly to identify signs of child sexual abuse by fellow employees, failure by relying upon mental health professionals, and/or failure by relying on people who claimed that they could treat child molesters.

36. Defendants also breached their duty to Plaintiff by failing to warn Plaintiff and Plaintiff's family of the risk that Fr. Punderson posed and the risks of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions. They also failed to warn them about any of the knowledge that Defendants had about child sexual abuse.

37. Defendants additionally violated a legal duty by failing to report known and/or suspected abuse of children by Fr. Punderson and/or its other agents to the child protection agencies, police and law enforcement.

38. Defendants were negligent and/or made representations to Plaintiff and Plaintiff's family during each and every year of Plaintiff's minority.

39. As a result of Defendants' negligence as described herein, Plaintiff has suffered, and will continue to suffer, great pain of mind and body, severe and permanent emotional distress, physical manifestations of emotional distress, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem, humiliation, physical, personal and psychological injuries. Plaintiff was prevented, and will continue to be prevented, from performing normal daily activities and obtaining the full enjoyment of life; and/or has incurred and will continue to incur expenses for psychological treatment, therapy, and counseling, and, on information and belief has and/or will incur loss of income and/or loss of earning capacity.

COUNT I: NEGLIGENCE

Plaintiff incorporates all consistent paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully set forth under this count.

40. Each Defendant owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care to protect the Plaintiff

from injury.

41. Each Defendant owed Plaintiff a duty of care because each Defendant had a special relationship with Plaintiff.

42. Defendants also had a duty arising from the special relationship that existed with Plaintiff, Plaintiff's parents, and other parents of young, innocent, vulnerable children, to properly train and supervise their clerics. This special relationship arose because of the high degree of vulnerability of the children entrusted to their care. As a result of this high degree of vulnerability and risk of sexual abuse inherent in such a special relationship, Defendants had a duty to establish measures of protection not necessary for persons who are older and better able to safeguard themselves.

43. Each Defendant owed Plaintiff a duty to protect Plaintiff from harm because each Defendant also had a special relationship with Fr. Punderson.

44. Defendants owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care because they solicited youth and parents for participation in their youth programs; encouraged youth and parents to have the youth participate in their programs; undertook custody of minor children, including Plaintiff; promoted their facilities and programs as being safe for children; held their agents, including Fr. Punderson, out as safe to work with children; encouraged parents and children to spend time with their agents; and/or encouraged their agents, including Fr. Punderson, to spend time with, interact with, and recruit children.

45. By holding Fr. Punderson out as safe to work with children, and by undertaking the custody, supervision of, and/or care of the minor Plaintiff, each Defendant entered into a fiduciary relationship with the minor Plaintiff. As a result of Plaintiff being a minor, and by Defendants undertaking the care and guidance of the then vulnerable minor Plaintiff, each Defendant held a position of empowerment over Plaintiff.

46. Further, Defendants, by holding themselves out as being able to provide a safe environment for children, solicited and/or accepted this position of empowerment. Defendants thus entered into a fiduciary relationship with Plaintiff. Defendants exploited their position of empowerment, putting Plaintiff at risk to be sexually assaulted.

47. By accepting custody and/or supervision of the minor Plaintiff, Defendants established an *in loco parentis* relationship with Plaintiff and in so doing, owed Plaintiff a duty to protect Plaintiff from injury. Further, Defendants entered into a fiduciary relationship with Plaintiff by undertaking the custody, supervision of, and/or care of the minor Plaintiff. As a result of Plaintiff being a minor, and by Defendants undertaking the care and guidance of the Plaintiff, Defendants also held a position of empowerment over Plaintiff. Further, Defendants, by holding themselves out as being able to provide a safe environment for children, solicited and/or accepted this position of empowerment. Defendants, through its employees, exploited this power over Plaintiff and thereby put the minor Plaintiff at risk for sexual abuse.

48. By establishing and/or operating the Dioceses and Christ the King, accepting the minor Plaintiff as a participant in their programs, holding their facilities and programs out to be a safe environment for Plaintiff, accepting custody of the minor Plaintiff *in loco parentis*, and by establishing a fiduciary relationship with Plaintiff, Defendants entered into an express and/or implied duty to properly supervise Plaintiff and provide a reasonably safe environment for children, who participated in their programs. Defendants owed Plaintiff a duty to properly supervise Plaintiff to prevent harm from foreseeable dangers. Defendants had the duty to exercise the same degree of care over minors under their control as a reasonably prudent person would have exercised under similar circumstances.

49. By establishing and operating the Dioceses and Christ the King, which offered educational programs to children and which may have included a school, and by accepting the

enrollment and participation of the minor Plaintiff as a participant in those educational programs, Defendants owed Plaintiff a duty to properly supervise Plaintiff to prevent harm from generally foreseeable dangers.

50. Each Defendant owed Plaintiff a duty to protect Plaintiff from harm because Defendants invited Plaintiff onto their property and Fr. Punderson posed a dangerous condition on Defendants' property.

51. Each Defendant breached its duties to Plaintiff by failing to use reasonable care. Each Defendant's failures include, but are not limited to, failing to properly supervise Fr. Punderson, failing to properly supervise Plaintiff and failing to protect Plaintiff from a known danger.

52. As a direct result of the foregoing, Plaintiff sustained physical, emotional, and psychological injuries, along with pain and suffering.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants, jointly and/or severally, for compensatory damages, together with interest and costs in an unspecified amount, plus costs, disbursements, reasonable attorneys' fees, interest, and such other and further relief as the court deems just and equitable.

COUNT II: NEGLIGENT TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Plaintiff incorporates all consistent paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully set forth under this count.

53. At all times material, Fr. Punderson was employed by Defendants and was under each Defendant's direct supervision, employ, and control when he committed the wrongful acts alleged herein. Fr. Punderson engaged in the wrongful conduct while acting in the course and scope of his employment with Defendants and/or accomplished the sexual abuse by virtue of his job-created authority.

54. Defendants had a duty, arising from their employment of Fr. Punderson, to ensure that Fr. Punderson did not sexually molest children.

55. Further, Defendants owed a duty to train and educate employees and administrators and establish adequate and effective policies and procedures calculated to detect, prevent, and address inappropriate behavior and conduct between clerics and children.

56. Defendants were negligent in the training, supervision, and instruction of their employees. Defendants failed to timely and properly educate, train, supervise, and/or monitor their agents or employees with regard to policies and procedures that should be followed when sexual abuse of a child is suspected or observed.

57. Defendants were additionally negligent in failing to supervise, monitor, chaperone, and/or investigate Fr. Punderson and/or in failing to create, institute, and/or enforce rules, policies, procedures, and/or regulations to prevent Fr. Punderson's sexual abuse of Plaintiff.

58. In failing to properly supervise Fr. Punderson, and in failing to establish such training procedures for employees and administrators, Defendants failed to exercise the degree of care that a reasonably prudent person would have exercised under similar circumstances.

59. As a direct and proximate result of the foregoing, Plaintiff sustained physical, emotional, and psychological injuries, along with pain and suffering.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants, jointly and/or severally, for compensatory damages, together with interest and costs in an unspecified amount, plus costs, disbursements, reasonable attorneys' fees, interest, and such other and further relief as the court deems just and equitable.

COUNT III: NEGLIGENT RETENTION

Plaintiff incorporates all consistent paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully set forth under this count.

60. At all times material, Fr. Punderson was employed by Defendants and was under each Defendant's direct supervision, employ, and control when he committed the wrongful acts alleged herein.

61. Defendants became aware or should have become aware of Fr. Punderson's propensity for sexual abuse, and failed to take any further action to remedy the problem and failed to investigate or remove Fr. Punderson from working with children.

62. Defendants negligently retained Fr. Punderson with knowledge of Fr. Punderson's propensity for the type of behavior which resulted in Plaintiff's injuries in this action.

63. Defendants negligently retained Fr. Punderson in a position where he had access to children and could foreseeably cause harm which Plaintiff would not have been subjected to had Defendants taken reasonable care.

64. In failing to timely remove Fr. Punderson from working with children or terminate the employment of Fr. Punderson, Defendants failed to exercise the degree of care that a reasonably prudent person would have exercised under similar circumstances.

65. As a direct and proximate result of the foregoing, Plaintiff sustained physical, emotional, and psychological injuries, along with pain and suffering.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants, jointly and/or severally, for compensatory damages, together with interest and costs in an unspecified amount, plus costs, disbursements, reasonable attorneys' fees, interest, and such other and further relief as the court deems just and equitable.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

The Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all of the triable issues of this Complaint, pursuant to New Jersey Court Rules 1:8-2(b) and 4:35-1(a).

RULE 4:5-1 CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the matter in controversy is not the subject of any other pending and/or contemplated action or pending and or contemplated proceeding. I know of no other parties who should be joined in this action at this time.

GIANFORCARO LAW

JEFF ANDERSON & ASSOCIATES PA

/s/ Gregory G. Gianforcaro
Gregory G. Gianforcaro, Esq.
Attorney for Plaintiff

/s/ Jeffrey R. Anderson / Trusha P. Goffe /
Rita M. Gribko / Nahid Shaikh
Jeffrey R. Anderson, Esq.
Trusha P. Goffe, Esq.
Rita M. Gribko, Esq.
Nahid Shaikh, Esq.
Attorneys for Plaintiff

Dated: November 9, 2020

DESIGNATION OF TRIAL COUNSEL

Pursuant to Rule 4:25-4, Plaintiff hereby designates Gregory G. Gianforcaro, Esq. as trial counsel for Plaintiff.

GIANFORCARO LAW

JEFF ANDERSON & ASSOCIATES PA

/s/ Gregory G. Gianforcaro
Gregory G. Gianforcaro, Esq.
Attorney for Plaintiff

/s/ Jeffrey R. Anderson / Trusha P. Goffe /
Rita M. Gribko / Nahid Shaikh
Jeffrey R. Anderson, Esq.
Trusha P. Goffe, Esq.
Rita M. Gribko, Esq.
Nahid Shaikh, Esq.
Attorneys for Plaintiff

Dated: November 9, 2020