

Father Donald Cooper

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1936
YEAR OF DEATH:	December 16, 2011
ORDINATION:	May 23, 1963

Employment/Assignment History

6/1963-5/1964	Bradford Central High Christian High School, Bradford, PA
5/1964-6/1971	St. Titus, Titusville, PA
6/1971-6/1975	St. George, Erie, PA
6/1975-11/1984	St. Charles, New Bethlehem, PA
11/1984-6/1987	Mount Calvary, Erie, PA
6/1987-3/1988	Assumption, Oil City, PA
3/1988-6/1989	St. Catherine, DuBois, PA
3/1988-4/1989	St. Anthony, Walston, PA
6/1989-7/2002	St. Joseph, Force, PA
7/2002-6/2005	Christ the King, Houtzdale, PA
10/2002-6/2005	Holy Trinity, Ramey, PA
6/2005	Retired

Summary

In 2005, a 40-year-old man sent an e-mail communication to the Diocese of Erie to report that he had been subjected to inappropriate sexual contact by Father Donald Cooper between 1981 and 1982. Cooper was a priest at St. Charles during the time period of the allegation. The victim stated that Cooper had abused him multiple times over that time period and had left him with years of emotional trauma.

The victim explained that, at the time, he was a 16-year-old boy who was looking for spiritual fulfillment in his life. His immediate family were not church goers, but the victim was introduced to the Catholic church by a family friend. The victim soon took a strong liking to the faith and wanted to learn more about it. The victim was attending St. Charles when Cooper offered him personalized catechism lessons to instruct him in the faith. Over time, a relationship developed and Cooper started to take the victim on overnight trips where they would stay in various hotels and motels. Cooper would convince the young victim to take a shower with him or to spend time with him in a sauna. This is when the molestation would take place. Cooper would massage the victim and fondle his genitals. The victim was also subjected to Cooper masturbating in front of him. The abuse took place in various hotels and also occurred in the church rectory. The victim stated that a retired priest, Father William Smith, lived in the rectory and knew of the abuse but did nothing about it.

Summary

When the victim reported the abuse in 2005, an internal investigation was conducted by Monsignor Robert Smith. When confronted, Cooper admitted that he did shower and use the sauna with the victim, and that he gave the victim massages. However, he did not admit to the masturbation. Once the interviews were conducted, it was the opinion of Smith that the victim was telling the truth and that his account was credible. Cooper agreed that he would retire and would no longer be able to serve as a priest. Additionally, the church and the victim came to an agreement wherein the Diocese would pay for the victim's past and future therapy sessions and medication and also pay off \$19,530 of the victim's personal debt.