

Russell Romano

Credibly accused child-molesting priest becomes a licensed state counselor

In 1985, the allegations began to pour in about Russell Romano. Victims told the Archdiocese that he took boys alone and in groups to his room in the rectory. There, he would give them alcohol, show them hard-core pornography, and sexually abuse them. When Kincanas learned of the allegations, he said that the hugging, kissing and alcohol must stop, but that the Archdiocese must show care and compassion for Russell. There is no outreach to victims and the police are not informed.

In 1986, an official at Quigley South High School reported Romano to DCFS and the agency found the report credible. There was no evidence that charges are filed. While the investigation was going on, the Archdiocese did a “discreet” investigation of its own and finds more victims. They did not share their findings with DCFS or the police.

Romano was sent to treatment at the St. Luke’s Institute, where he was allegedly chemically sterilized. After his release, the Archdiocese unsuccessfully tried to get Russell a job as a chaplain. Russell resigned from the priesthood in 1991 and was laicized in 2009.

In 2008, the Archdiocese learned that Romano is working as a licensed counselor. They do not immediately inform the healthcare agency where Romano works.

The Archdiocese announced that Romano is an accused cleric in 2013. The health care agency where Romano works opened an investigation. Romano immediately retired.

There are numerous credible allegations against Romano.

TIMELINE OF DOCUMENTS- RUSSELL ROMANO

5/9/73 – Ordained

5/9/73 – Associate Pastor, St. Ann, Lausing, IL

6/7/74 – Associate Pastor and Vocation Director, St. Leonard, Berwyn, IL

1975 According to a 2011 letter, a survivor reported sexual abuse by Romano at St. Leonard’s and asked if others had reported as well. (AOC 004539- AOC 004540)

6/11/79 – Associate Pastor, Our Lady Mother of the Church

8/11/80 – Instructor, Quigley Seminary South, In Residence, St. Barbara, Brookfield, IL

3/1/85 Report of hugging and kissing students determined true. (AOC 004521- AOC 004522; AOC 004580)

- 3/85 Rector, Fr. John Klein, confronts Romano and sets up a monthly supervision plan to monitor “the situation”. (AOC 004567)**
- 4/15/85 Joe Binder, Quigley South school counselor, brings concern to Rector, Fr. John Klein, that Romano is taking students to St. Barbara rectory, students are staying overnight, Romano is providing alcohol “to loosen them up” and showing hard core porn movies. (AOC 004515)
- 4/26/85 Student comes to Quigley administration regarding Romano asking him out to dinner and says that he had problems with Romano in the past. Fr. Jack Daley told student that Romano broke his supervision contract. (AOC 004515)
- 4/28/85 Fr. John Klein consults Bishop Gerald Kincanas regarding Romano behavior. Kincanas has a two-part approach: 1) Express concern for Romano; 2) Hugs, kisses, liquor, and porn movies must stop. (AOC 004516)**
- 4/29/85 Confidential meeting on Romano incidents with Quigley High School students. Romano admits to giving students alcohol, showing porn movies, kissing and hugging. Romano promises to stop immediately. Romano felt there were only four students. (AOC 004515- AOC 004517)
- 1985 Romano provides boys with alcohol, showed porno movies, hugged, kissed, groped and slept with them at St. Barbara’s rectory. (AOC 004542)
- 3/24/86 Joe Binder, Quigley Seminary High School, makes suspected child abuse report on Russell Romano, SCR case No. 0221374A2B02. (AOC 004512)
- 3/24/86 Joe Binder calls Rector, Fr. John Klein, on Romano report. (AOC 004567)
- 3/25/86 Klein, Romano, and Vicar for Priests meet to discuss allegations and Romano’s response. Archdiocese commences “discreet” investigation of 30 past and present students. (AOC 004514)**
- 3/25/86 Klein meets with Romano to discuss further allegations. Actions taken are redacted from Archdiocese document. (AOC 004567)
- 4/25/86 Memo from Vicar for Clergy Tom Ventura reports that a Niles College sophomore reported Romano fondled him in 1984. A Niles Freshman reported one night in High School while sleeping in Romano’s room at St. Barbara’s, he awoke to Romano touching his crotch. (AOC 004568)
- 4/25/86 Ventura called all of Romano’s former Pastors and all reported Romano to be a loner who never ate meals with other priests.

- 1986 During a 1986 investigation into Roman Fr. Peter Hayes reports to the Vicar for Clergy, Fr. Tom Ventura, complaints that Romano would call teenage boys late at night to go to movies, host teenage boys in his rectory room and sometimes serve them beer while he was at Our Lady Mother of the Church. (AOC 004568)
- 4/25/86 Five additional reports of Romano at Quigley South allege hugs, kisses, serving beer, showing porn, sleeping with students at St. Barbara's rectory. Reports are determined to be true by Archdiocese records. (AOC 004521- AOC 004522)
- 4/26/86 Memo to Archdiocese Rectors of Seminaries regarding Romano from Klein discussing the Archdiocese's internal investigation including 30 interviews with students from Quigley and Niles College. Two more survivors are discovered. All cases involved touching in the genital area. The investigation is concluded. "We felt it reasonable to conclude that there were no other individuals or incidents that needed further investigation." (AOC 004565- AOC 004566)
- 4/28/86 Department of Children and Family Services found credible evidence of child abuse by Romano. (AOC 004512)

4/86- Leave of Absence, St. Luke Institute

- In 2008 Review Board notes Fr. Smilanic reported that Romano participated in treatment including chemical sterilization. (AOC 004500)
- 7/19/86 Romano contacting survivors, Joe Binder will contact T.V., "key element is that we do not want the kids upset by this..." (AOC 004511)
- 1/11/87 Letter from Klein to Ventura says that Romano is back in town and violated his contract by visiting students/parents. "We're somewhat scared and wary at this moment and feel we must be very cautious for the good of our institution and our young men."
- 4/28/87 Romano sent to Clinical Pastoral Education with Alexian Brothers to train as Hospital Chaplain. He meets with Ventura and Alexian Brothers Superior. Romano hopes as a Hospital Chaplain he is not "blacklisted" by circumstances. (AOC 004508; AOC 004506)
- 12/18/87 Memo to Romano's file says that Bishop Francis Roque of Military Archdiocese called Ventura to say he is reluctant to endorse Romano and that there are too many pressures in military chaplaincy ministry. Priests there are like gypsies with little control that over them. (AOC 004509)
- 1/22/91 Cardinal Bernardin grants Romano leave of absence. Bishop Goedert thanks Romano for his many years of dedicated service. (AOC 004519- AOC 004520)

- 10/8/91 Cardinal Bernardin accepts Romano's resignation. (AOC 004518)
- 3/19/04 Chancellor Jimmy Lago writes "in March 1986 Archbishop determined there was reason to suspect Russell Lawrence Romano had engaged with sexual misconduct with a minor". (AOC 004523)**
- 8/23/07 Allegations from 3/1/85 to 8/23/07 lodged against Romano. (AOC 004577-AOC 004590)
- 1/19/08 Archdiocese aware Romano is an active licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, Review board recommends Cardinal George contact authorities. (AOC 004500)**

5/09 - Laicized

- 3/11/11 Romano Survivor from Quigley Seminary South writes Archdiocese that Romano is still a licensed therapist. (AOC 004532)