

Phone interview with Donald W. Trautman
Retired -- Bishop, Erie (Pa.) Diocese; Auxiliary Bishop, Buffalo Diocese
Friday, June 21, 2019 -- 11:25 a.m.

CHARLIE SPECHT: Well, I just want to give you a chance to respond to Jim [Faluszczak] and anything that he said, and then also we weren't able to reach you the other day, but if you wanted to give a response to Mr. Bottlinger and the allegations...

DONALD TRAUTMAN: Well, let me just say...Try to remember something 35 years ago [laughs]...How do [you] expect a person to remember something 35...I will say this: positively and with absolute certitude, I never went to that rectory without a reason. So there must have been a confirmation or something that brought me there. Ask Bottlinger why I was there. I don't know why I was there. I dispute that. I don't know if I was there.

SPECHT: OK. So you don't remember...

TRAUTMAN: What was the occasion? That's 35 years ago. Can you remember what you did two months ago?

SPECHT: Right. Right. What about the allegation that his attorneys were making about, there was two other people who had come forward with claims...

TRAUTMAN: That would be in the files of the Buffalo Diocese, and I think I should see the files in the Buffalo Diocese first to refresh my memory. That's 35 years ago.

SPECHT: Yeah. So you're saying you don't really recall this.

TRAUTMAN: No I don't recall. In the paper this morning, it was an article that said that I told the young man, 'You've placed yourself in bad circumstances.' That sounds like me. I would say that to someone. I don't remember the conditions or what the person said to me, but he should not have placed himself in those conditions.

What I remember was...that Bishop Head removed the faculties of the priest...and we sent him off to Southdown in Canada for therapeutic help. That was our regular approach. That's what we always did.

SPECHT: So you're saying...so you're not denying...you're saying that, yeah, he should not have put himself in that position.

TRAUTMAN: Yeah, I don't know what the circumstances were. I'd have to review the files. I haven't seen the files. But that sounds like me saying to a pen...a candidate, who committed...uh, did something wrong, 'You should not have put yourself in those circumstances,' whatever they were, whatever he told me at the time. I don't recall that.

SPECHT: I mean, just to be devil's advocate, do you see why people are looking at that and saying, "Well, jeez it sounds like you're blaming the victim?"

TRAUTMAN: They're hearing only one side of the story and it's not accurate. It's not accurate. So I hope the news media would be interested in truth.

SPECHT: Yeah. Well definitely. But I guess what I'm wondering is, from their point of view, they're looking at this and saying, you know, that people in your position should have been...that [it's] your responsibility not to put them in that position with the priest, as opposed to the victim not putting himself in a position. Do you understand why they are sort of upset about that?

TRAUTMAN: Well, they're not being told the full story. That's the issue. And I'd be glad to tell the story when I'm [done] looking at the files and have reviewed everything. It's 35 years later...you're asking me to think back. I question was I in the rectory at St. Mary's Lancaster? Why was I there?

And you know, the news media crafted a phrase, "in the private quarters of the priest" as if to insinuate there was something else going on. The lawyer phrased it. Say he was in the study. But in the private quarters, as if it was something evil?

SPECHT: They said it was his bedroom. And I did ask him, "Were you being abused?" He said, "No, I wasn't being abused right then..."

TRAUTMAN: Right.

SPECHT: But he said he was drunk or something and he was abused in other circumstances.

TRAUTMAN: So I mean, what's the big mystery? Why was...was this a confirmation? I'd like to examine why I was there. Ask him why I was there, if he knows.

SPECHT: And what do you say to the allegation that there was two other things [allegations] against Freeman that you knew about. Why would you not do something when you see...

TRAUTMAN: Something was done. His faculties were revoked and he was sent to Southdown for psychiatric evaluation. That was done.

SPECHT: And did you ever call the police or anything?

TRAUTMAN: Look...I'll have to look at the file to examine what we did...35 years ago, all right?

SPECHT: OK. I'm happy to print your comments. I just want to get your side of the story.

TRAUTMAN: Yeah.