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## **How Three Women Brought Abuse Cases to Light Women Tirelessly Pursued Abuse Rumors To Quit or Back down after Charges against Priests Surfaced**

By Mike McAndrew  
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Think of a pit bull with jaws locked on someone's ankle. A David taking on Goliath. A detective obsessed with a crime.

That's what the trio of Marianne Barone-Trent, Sue Sweet and Sandy Smith are like.

With no help from law enforcement or the Syracuse Diocese, the Oswego women spent up to a decade investigating rumors that Catholic priests had sexually abused minors in Central New York.

In becoming amateur sleuths, the three Catholic moms became adept at asking strangers painful and embarrassing sexual questions.

They visited prison to interview a convicted rapist. They searched for leads in cemetery records, dusty high school yearbooks, and old newspaper clippings. They put up with harassing hang-up phone calls and worried that their phones were tapped. They spent thousands of dollars to hire a private investigator.

Compiling lists of suspects, they mulled conspiracy theories late into the night.

"Of course I'm obsessed with it. But it's a good obsession. I'm obsessed with justice," said Barone-Trent, 56.

Often, they spent more than five hours a day on the investigation.

In Oswego, their efforts enraged some people.

One critic suggested this summer in a letter published by an Oswego newspaper that the women deserved to be excommunicated by the church.

The trio persevered, however, and convinced eight men from across America to publicly accuse Syracuse Diocese priests of abusing them as children.

"Those girls are doing a super job. They're trying to protect the kids of Oswego," said former Oswego resident Daniel Donahue, who confided about two years ago to Sweet that Monsignor Francis Furfaro molested him in the early 1960s.

"They were advocates," he said. "I knew I had someone to turn to."

Bishop James Moynihan of the Syracuse Diocese apologized to Donahue in May for whatever hurt was inflicted upon him.

The women's campaign came to a head this year as the Catholic Church was beset with a national priest sexual abuse crisis that erupted in Boston and spread across the country.

The crisis prompted Moynihan this summer to permanently remove from ministry at least six priests -

Furfaro and Monsignor H. Charles Sewall and the Revs. Donald Hebert, James Hayes, William Lorenz and Chester Misercola - because of credible allegations that they had sexual contact with minors.

The women had interviewed victims, or relatives of victims, of three of those priests.

Moynihan said the women played a role in resolving some of the cases.

"When the story first broke, I asked individuals who may have been harmed to come forward and to meet with me," Moynihan said. "I believe that Sue Sweet and Sandy Smith have helped individuals who were harmed in one way or another to find the courage to tell their story."

In recent meetings with Sweet and Smith, Moynihan said, "I found them both to be very committed to their Catholic faith and to the Catholic Church. I thanked them for their faith, for their strength and for their perseverance."

Barone-Trent, Sweet and Smith don't claim credit for uncovering all the abuse by Syracuse Diocese priests.

Moynihan voted in June for a national policy that mandated removing offending priests from all public ministry, Barone-Trent noted.

And the local news media also dug up information, she said.

But for years, the women said they seemed to be among the few reaching out to support clergy abuse victims and pressuring the diocese to defrock priests.

"We're all very different," said Barone-Trent. "But we have the same passion for justice."

Here's their story.

A mother of victims

Barone-Trent was the first of the trio to take on the church.

In December 1987, two of her sons, who were then 10 and 11, were molested by the Rev. Daniel Casey in the showers at the State University College at Oswego swimming pool, she said.

A divorced mother of four, Barone-Trent had been trying to reconnect with the church while raising her sons.

She had worked as a housekeeper in an Oswego church rectory for two years and as an art teacher at an Oswego Catholic elementary school for two years.

"Father Dan began calling my house and asking why the boys weren't signed up for religious education. I thought that was wonderful. He offered to help bring my boys back to the church," Barone-Trent said.

She has accused Casey of molesting her children the first time she allowed them to go anywhere with him alone.

Barone-Trent and another Oswego couple, who alleged their son had been molested by Casey, sued the diocese and Casey in 1992. Six years later, the diocese paid Barone-Trent \$150,000 to settle her suit.

By that time, an anonymous caller had telephoned Barone-Trent and told her another priest, Furfaro, had molested him as a youth.

Furfaro had been the pastor at St. Joseph Church for 40 years, had served on the Oswego school board for 21 years, and even talked of running for mayor.

Barone-Trent began investigating Furfaro, who retired in 1991 as St. Joseph's pastor and resides in Camillus.

"I was alone and frustrated and scared," Barone-Trent said. "I'd been to the Oswego County sheriff's. I'd called the FBI. Nobody helped."

Oswego County District Attorney Dennis Hawthorne has said that in the past seven years his office interviewed several men who alleged Furfaro molested them as children. He could not prosecute because the alleged deeds were not reported until the state's statute of limitations for sex crimes had passed, Hawthorne said.

A youth minister

A mother of three daughters and grandmother of five, Sweet works in the Oswego County Clerk's Office, filing paperwork in criminal and civil cases.

But she spent much of her free time doing volunteer work for St. Mary's Church.

In 1993, she chaperoned 11 Oswego children to Denver to see Pope John Paul II celebrate World Youth Day. Three years later, the Syracuse Diocese commissioned Sweet as a youth minister.

"She was wonderful with the kids," said the Rev. David Baehr, the former pastor at St. Mary's.

At St. Mary's, Sweet mentored high school boys who were considering the priesthood. Some of the boys began telling her stories about Furfaro and other Oswego priests, she said.

Sweet said she became convinced when a mental health counselor confided to her that he was treating a patient who claimed Furfaro molested him.

Barone-Trent's boss at the city of Oswego Assessment Office introduced her to Sweet.

The two women began searching for victims. They asked youths whom Sweet knew from her ministry and friends of Barone-Trent's children if they knew anyone who had been abused. They interviewed older men whom they heard had hung out at the rectory as children. They filled notebooks with handwritten notes on their interviews.

The investigation moved forward when the women met Jon Mosley. Mosley, who is 34, told the two women in 2000 that he was molested by Furfaro as a teenager. The diocese had paid him \$75,000 in 1999 to quietly settle his claim against Furfaro. He showed them a copy of his settlement agreement.

Sweet and Barone-Trent suspected Furfaro had abused many other children.

They contacted The Wanderer - a weekly Catholic newspaper published in St. Paul, Minn. The paper in 2000 published a story about the women's investigation of Furfaro.

After that, Sweet said she felt ostracized in her church and stopped serving as a youth minister.

A hospital-bed promise

Smith and her husband, Byron, traveled in 1989 to the Vatican to get information about the Latin Mass. They helped persuade the Syracuse Diocese in 1990 to sanction a Latin Mass once a week at Furfaro's St. Joseph Church in Oswego.

Smith met Sweet in the late 1990s at the Latin Mass.

In 1999, while awaiting surgery at Oswego Hospital on a kiwi-sized tumor near her heart, Smith prayed to the Holy Mother. Get her through the operation, she promised, and she would devote her life to whatever God wanted.

During Smith's recuperation, a priest offered to give a young relative of hers private religious instruction.

Sweet warned her that the priest had been charged in 1997 in the town of Clay with driving while intoxicated and endangering the welfare of a mentally incompetent man who was a passenger in his car. A Clay town justice sealed the case, which indicates the charges were dismissed.

Although there is no evidence that the case involved sexual conduct, Smith said she took Sweet's warning as a sign that God wanted her to help protect children from abusive priests.

"We've been stereotyped as being bitter, angry, out to get the church," said Smith, 52. "I love the church."

Worried that their probe was stagnating, Smith hired private investigator Joseph O'Brien of New York City in January to investigate Furfaro.

Smith took out a loan and sold a collection of antique Hummell figurines to pay his \$4,500 retainer.

O'Brien and the women convinced some men to tell their story of priest abuse to reporters and Moynihan.

What's next

The three women began investigating priests for different reasons. And now they're heading in different directions.

When she met with Moynihan on June 25, Sweet gave the bishop a list of 28 priests about whom she said she had received information regarding alleged sexual offenses.

Smith said she is willing to leave the matter in Moynihan's hands and return as a youth minister.

"I met my goal," Sweet said. "Everything has been accomplished."

In Smith's July 17 meeting with Moynihan, the bishop promised Furfaro's name would soon be removed from the St. Joseph parish center, Smith said.

It was removed the weekend of Aug. 3-4.

"I asked the bishop to provide counseling for the victims. He said the victims need to learn forgiveness," Smith said.

She hoped for a different response, she said.

"That broke my heart," she said.

But she said she was pleased that the bishop helped reconcile her and a former close friend, a priest who had stopped speaking to her when he learned she had hired a private investigator.

Barone-Trent said she does not want to meet with Moynihan. Instead, she's turned her attention to Albany where she wants state legislators to write tougher laws regarding priest sex abuse.

"We're going to keep bombarding them," she said of the diocese.

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