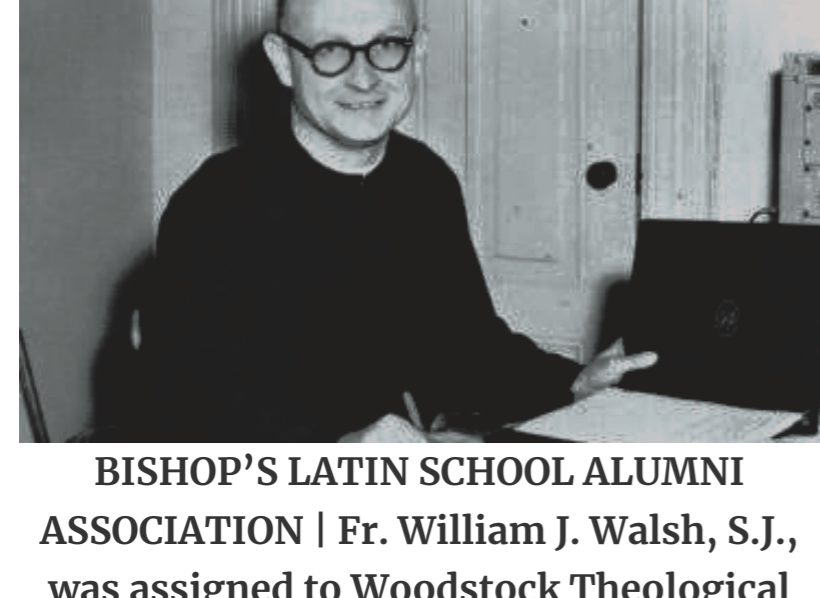


‘Sick Pleasure’: GU Jesuit Walsh Abused Nieces for Decades

March 15, 2019 by Riley Rogerson — 1 Comment



BISHOP’S LATIN SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION | Fr. William J. Walsh, S.J., was assigned to Woodstock Theological Center in 1996 when the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus was informed of sexual abuse allegations against him.

“We have a nightmarish fear that Father Walsh may sexually molest innocent female students, and little girls in the Georgetown area.”

Sarah Lynne Landsdale was 5 years old when her uncle, Fr. William J. Walsh, S.J., first molested her while wearing his clerical clothing. Approximately 40 years later, in 1996, she and four of her sisters told the Maryland Province that Walsh had abused each of them hundreds of times. And two years later, in 1998, she and her sisters called a press conference to plead for their uncle’s removal from Georgetown University’s campus.

Walsh, who served as a Georgetown professor during the 1966-67 school year and conducted research on campus from 1996 until 1998, **sexually abused** minors in at least four locations — including Washington, D.C. — over the course of four decades, according to a December 2018 report issued by the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus that deemed allegations against him credible.

Among the survivors of Walsh’s sexual abuse are five of his nieces, who brought their allegations to the province in July 1996 while he was working in China. The province removed Walsh from the ministry that year, prohibiting him from saying Mass and transferred him to the Woodstock Theological Center, a Jesuit-run research facility in Ida Ryan Hall on campus, where he worked until 1998.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, Walsh, who died in December, abused each of the five sisters hundreds of times after their father passed away when they were between ages 6 and 14, according to public statements the sisters made in 1998.

Walsh researched theology as an administrative assistant at Woodstock from 1996 to 1998. During this time period, he lived in the Woodstock Residential Community, two blocks from Georgetown’s front gates.

Walsh also underwent a treatment program while working at Woodstock, according to a Maryland Province statement **released** in response to the Landsdale sisters’ April 20, 1998 press conference. The program **included** attending weekly individual and group therapy, contacting a sponsor on a regular basis and spending one week at at treatment center in Silver Spring, Md., every year, according to the 1998 statement of Susan Landsdale Peters, one of Walsh’s nieces, based on her conversations with the Maryland Province.

The university first learned of sexual abuse allegations against Walsh through news reports of the Landsdales’ press conferences that year, prohibiting him from saying Mass and a university spokesperson.



Georgetown **responded** to the sisters’ statements in a memo released the same day, offering sympathy and clarifying that Walsh’s employment was not directly linked to the university.

The statement did not address Walsh’s access to Georgetown students while he worked in the Woodstock Theological Center, Denis Ventriglia, the Landsdales’ lawyer at the time, said in a phone interview with The Hoya.

“Georgetown University should be asked: What vetting of Father Walsh did Georgetown University perform prior to allowing him in the Woodstock Theological Center?” Ventriglia said.

Two decades later, the university declined to comment on any oversight of hiring at Woodstock at the time, saying only that the Maryland Province owned and operated the research center.

The 1998 university statement also did not reference Walsh’s past work as a Georgetown professor.

Decades earlier, Walsh taught “Christian Marriage,” an undergraduate theology class at Georgetown during the 1966-67 academic year. University President John J. DeGioia **noted** Walsh’s year teaching at Georgetown in a universitywide email following the release of the Maryland Province’s report.

Walsh also lived in the Georgetown Jesuit Community from 1974 to 1976, an assignment undocumented by the Maryland Province but confirmed through the Official Catholic Directories from those years.

Though there are no abuse accusations against Walsh from his time at Georgetown, the Maryland Province has documented credible allegations from the 1950s through the 1980s, including instances of abuse in Washington, D.C.

Five of the Landsdale sisters were abused by Walsh, but for decades, each was unaware of their uncle’s abuse of the others. While assigned to Xiamen University in China in 1996, Walsh sent a letter to a family member describing his sexual fantasies about an orphaned 3-year-old girl, according to Peters.

“I felt nauseated when I thought about this poor defenseless Chinese child,” Peters said in her 1998 statement. “I also finally realized after all my years of mental anguish and suffering, that he was to be blamed for the molestations on me, not I.”

In their 50s, five of the Lansdale sisters — Walsh’s nieces — realized they had all been molested by their uncle only after reading the letter. In July 1996, Peters contacted the Maryland Province in Baltimore to report the letter and their abuse as children, according to the Maryland Province’s 1998 statement.

The Maryland Province did not remove Walsh from Woodstock until the sisters’ public statements two years later. At that point, he was sent to live in Ferdinand Wheeler House, a Jesuit residence in Baltimore, where his movement and actions were restricted by the Maryland Province. He was then transferred to Colombiere Jesuit Community in Baltimore, where he lived until his death.

Fr. John Langan, S.J., a friend of Walsh’s who worked with him at Woodstock and lived with him at Colombiere, was surprised by the accusations against Walsh. Langan is a philosophy professor at Georgetown and serves as the university’s Cardinal Bernardin Chair of Catholic Social Thought.

“He was a very kind, helpful person, rather disciplined and dignified but also quite good humored, and he could be quite funny and had a great love of birds,” Langan said in a phone interview with The Hoya. “This was a situation which I think was bound to be puzzling because the general patterns of the man’s life were quite praiseworthy, and I don’t know that anybody would find it easy to fit the accusations into the general picture of how he lived and dealt with people.”

Walsh previously had a “problem” with an individual and received three to four months of psychiatric care before Peters reported her and her sisters’ abuse to the Jesuits in 1996, according to Peters’ statement.

Walsh **abused** one of the sisters, Victoria Landsdale Long, over 200 times throughout her youth, usually while wearing his collar, according to Long’s 1998 statement.

“Father Walsh would get me alone to take advantage of my innocence and molest me,” Long said. “I remember how he always had such a soft, trusting, smooth voice while his hands, trembling, did sinful outrageous acts to my young virginal body.”

One of Long’s sisters, Mary Therese Landsdale Williams, **recounted** similar abusive encounters with Walsh, whom she referred to as “Uncle Billy,” in her 1998 statement, written with two of her sisters.

“Father Walsh, also our Uncle Billy, took advantage of our youth and vulnerabilities for his own perverted sexual pleasure and left us with defective souls. It disgusts us to think that our childhood was sacrificed for his moments of sick pleasures,” Williams said. “We have had to pick up our shattered lives with the fact we are forever changed.”

In 1997, Peters filed a criminal complaint against Walsh in Prince George’s County, Md., which was dismissed because the statute of limitations had expired.

Before Walsh died at 95 in December, he lived comfortably at Colombiere Jesuit Community in Baltimore with Langan.

“It is fairly new and it’s a quite pleasant, well-designed complex. It’s a good location; it’s within the city of Baltimore,” Langan said. “There are a lot of birds, a lot of trees and very pleasant to live in.”

Colombiere, which opened in 2011, houses about 40 retired Jesuits. The community is within a one-mile radius of four primary schools.

If you would like to share any information regarding this investigation, please contact The Hoya at GUpriests@thehoya.com or through any methods described [here](#). Campus, local and national resources for processing this content can be found [here](#).

This article has been updated to correctly reflect the location of Woodstock Theological Center from Walsh’s time working there.

Comments

Harvey Rancer says
December 28, 2019 at 5:06 pm

Bill died a good man, fully repentant and an inspiration to many. He was resigned to the fact that his name would forever be known for acts borne of mental illness.

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