

**Rev. Joseph L. DiGregorio**  
**Archdiocese of Philadelphia**

(A chapter from the book, *Catholic Priests Falsely Accused* by David F. Pierre, Jr. (2011))

As an example of a case that supposedly contained “substantial evidence” of abuse, the 2011 Philadelphia grand jury report profiled the case of Rev. Joseph L. DiGregorio, a priest who had served over four decades in ministry.

Fr. DiGregorio’s record as a pastor was unblemished until a woman came forward in 2005 to accuse the cleric of forcefully molesting her nearly forty years earlier, in “1967 or 1968.” The review board spent well over a year examining his case. In 2006 the board concluded that “evidence obtained through the investigative process was not sufficient to substantiate” the single allegation against the cleric. With no other complaints against the pastor, it recommended that Fr. DiGregorio return to ministry.

Yet the grand jury report took strong issue with the archdiocese’s decision to allow Fr. DiGregorio back to work. The report cited the case of Fr. DiGregorio as another example of how the archdiocese had supposedly recklessly returned a “credibly accused” molester back into an environment where he supposedly could harm minors again.

The fact that Fr. DiGregorio had only a single, dubious complaint over such a long period of time did not seem to matter to the grand jury. The fact that the alleged incident took place nearly four decades earlier did not factor into its opinion either.

And, most astonishingly, the grand jury arrived at its conclusion without even interviewing Fr. DiGregorio. The grand jury never subpoenaed the cleric. Neither did it ask him to testify or provide a statement to give his version of events. For the grand jury, the uncorroborated testimony of the single accuser was enough to slam Fr. DiGregorio and the archdiocesan review board for “callousness.”<sup>1</sup>

Bowing to intense public pressure following the release of the grand jury report, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia rapidly re-suspended Fr. DiGregorio (along with two other priests the report profiled).

Yet rather than taking his suspension and negative publicity lying down, Fr. DiGregorio aggressively went to the media to declare his innocence. On February 18, 2011, the priest appeared live on *The Dom Giordano Show* on Talk Radio WPHT 1210AM.

With a number of local television stations gathered at the radio station to record his appearance, Fr. DiGregorio took strong exception to the claims about his case in the grand jury report and to the media reports that promulgated them. For starters, an article about his case in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* didn’t even identify his name correctly. (It named him as Fr. “Stephen” DiGregorio, not Joseph.)

Speaking over the airwaves, Fr. DiGregorio strongly professed his innocence.<sup>2</sup>

“I have not in my whole life ever, ever, ever acted in an inappropriate way – not only with a child, but with anybody. Period.

“Every statement [the accuser] made concerning me is an absolute lie, completely and totally a lie. I never once touched her. I never once groped her or did anything

inappropriate. I was never in her company alone. The only times I saw her was when she came to the rectory to see [another priest].

“In my almost 45 years of me being a priest my character and integrity have never been questioned. Almost 20 of those 45 years were spent as an army chaplain in the United States Army. I was deployed in Operation Desert Shield, Desert Storm for almost a year, and again in Operation Iraqi Freedom for 10 months.

“I love my country, I love my Church. I am not intimidated by false accusations against my character. I am, however, angry – very angry – and I intend to fight these accusations with every legal means at my disposal.”

Fr. DiGregorio then cited a number of glaring inconsistencies in his accuser’s allegations. For example, as the priest stated, “In the original allegation the young woman in question states I touched her once in an inappropriate manner. [Years later, she claimed] that I repeatedly touched and groped her.

“Perhaps some memory-awakening drug was administered,” said the priest. “I categorically stated then as I do now that I never touched her in any manner whatsoever.”

In addition, Fr. DiGregorio went on to state that he totally understands the anger people have felt in recent years over the despicable stories of abuse at the hands of Catholic clergy.

“I sympathize totally with the victims of sexual abuse, especially those by priests,” the priest continued over the airwaves. “I sympathize with them entirely. If a priest has done something wrong, and is credibly proven that he did, he should be punished. I’m the first to have said that. I said that consistently when I was in the army.”

Fr. DiGregorio’s appearance on *The Dom Giordano Show* concluded with phone calls from listeners into the show.

Many callers voiced support for the priest. Those who have been parishioners under his watch testified to the man’s integrity.

“I don’t believe any of it,” a caller, Linda, said of the accusations against her one-time priest.

As Fr. DiGregorio listened to the words of encouragement from listeners, he was visibly moved to tears.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Grand Jury, “In the Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District of Philadelphia, Criminal Trial Division,” January 2011. <http://www.phila.gov/districtattorney/PDFs/clergyAbuse2-finalReport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Audiotape on file. *The Dom Giordano Show*, WPHT 1210AM, February 18, 2011.