

December 20, 1976

His Excellency
The Most Reverend William R. Johnson
440 South Batavia Street
Orange, California 92668

ATTENTION: Father Michael Driscoll

Dear Father Driscoll,

A few days ago I talked by phone to Bishop Johnson about a possible pastoral assignment for Father Siegfried Widera of this Archdiocese. The conversation was very general and the Bishop suggested that perhaps something could be done on a temporary basis. My reason for approaching Bishop Johnson is founded in the fact that Father Widera's brother and family live in Costa Mesa, California. In the course of our conversation the Bishop informed me that he would be absent for a while and asked that I discuss the matter further with you.

I talked to Father Widera this morning and informed him that I was writing to you at the Bishop's request. I learned that he is leaving to visit his brother and will arrive in California on or about January 5th. Under the circumstances I recommended that upon his arrival he immediately get in touch with you or with the Bishop and that in the meantime I would have written to you and to His Excellency.

Father Widera was ordained in 1967 and has done good work for the Diocese in the places to which he was assigned. In his earlier years there was a moral problem having to do with a boy in school. This seemed adequately confronted through treatment and an intense desire upon Father's part to avoid any repetition of a previous offense.

More recently, however, there has been a repetition, and according to our State Laws further psychiatric treatment is mandated with the strong recommendation that no immediate assignment be made in the environs of the Archdiocese.

Father Widera has cooperated in every way and is presently under treatment. His doctor is somewhat in favor of his leaving the scene but expects that there will be continuing treatment. This has already been arranged and a doctor in California will take over at this point. From all the professional information I can gather there would seem no great risk in allowing this man to return to pastoral work, but there are legal complications at present writing. Incidentally, these legal technicalities would permit Father's going to another State as long as treatment is continued.

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I would not expect Bishop Johnson or yourself to act in this matter without first of all interviewing Father Widera and satisfying yourself that charity will not add to existing personnel problems. If the man could be assigned on a temporary basis or if he could be given some part-time work that would give him the support of living in residence with other priests, half of the problem would be licked. This must be left to the Bishop's discretion and this discretion should not be exercised until pertinent and important questions have been answered. I hope this can be accomplished in a personal interview sometime in January.

There is no thought of incardination involved, and I am quite willing to accept the man back into the Archdiocese whenever circumstances would indicate. Though I anticipate no recurrence of this past aberration, I would certainly want to be informed if the slightest suspicion were to develop. I would like to show fraternal charity to a fellow priest but I cannot be virtuous at the expense of a fellow Bishop.

With the warmest of personal regards and with every good wish for the Holiday Season, I am

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Reverend William E. Cousins
Archbishop of Milwaukee