

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

SUFFOLK, ss

SUPERIOR COURT DEPARTMENT
SUCV 2002-04551 T1
(originally filed in MICV-2002-0626)
(consolidated with SUCV-2002-1296)

GREGORY FORD, ET AL.,
Plaintiffs,

v.

BERNARD CARDINAL LAW,
a.k.a., CARDINAL BERNARD F.
LAW, ET AL.,
Defendants.

AFFIDAVIT OF
THOMAS R. BLANCHETTE

I, Thomas Blanchette, being duly sworn, depose and state as follows:

1. I was born on January 28, 1948. I grew up in Sudbury, Massachusetts and attended Our Lady of Fatima Church with my family.
2. I was sexually abused by Father Joseph Birmingham from approximately 1960 to 1963. Several of my brothers were also sexually abused by Father Birmingham.
3. My family was friendly with Father Birmingham during his ministry at Our Lady of Fatima from 1960 until 1964. He visited my home on numerous occasions.
4. In or about 1988, I visited Father Birmingham at St. Brigid's rectory in Lexington. We were alone in the living room with a German Shepherd dog. I gave Father Birmingham a brief autobiography and said I couldn't understand why I had been so angry all my life. I told him that I realized that I was angry because of my relationship with him.

5. Father Birmingham equivocated about his personal difficulties. He told me that both his parents were deceased, that he was an only child and that he was suffering from a mysterious illness. He told me that he had been in the hospital and they could not find out what was wrong with him.

6. I told him that what he did to my brothers and I and a list of other boys was wrong and that he had no right to do that and that I did not think anyone had ever told him that. He said he did not remember the other boys I listed.

7. I then said, "Having said that brings me to the real reason I have come here tonight, which is to ask you to forgive me for the hatred and resentment I have held against you for 25 years." When I said that, he stood up, raised his hands angrily shaking his fists, and, in a strange, deep and violent voice said "Why are you asking me to forgive you." Through tears, I answered "because the Bible tells me to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us." Father Birmingham fell back into his chair as if he had been punched. He became very quiet as tears ran down his face.

8. More than a year later I went to see Father Birmingham again. I heard he was gravely ill and was in Symmes Hospital in Arlington. When I went to Father Birmingham's room I saw Father Lawrence Kelley, a seminary classmate of Father Birmingham who in 1968 joined the Army as a Chaplain, had been in the army and was a Colonel in charge of recruiting priests to the army. Father Kelley told me he had been to my family's home several times with Father Birmingham.

9. He told me that Father Birmingham was very ill and in a great deal of pain and had just been given a morphine shot. Father Kelley told me that Father Birmingham

had pneumocystic pneumonia and cancer. I asked if I could pray for him. I went into Father Birmingham's room, knelt beside him and held his hand. He was about 80 pounds. All his hair had fallen out and what was left was white. His breathing was extremely labored. He opened his eyes and I said, "Father Birmingham, it's Tommy Blanchette from Sudbury. I have come to visit you." He was unable to converse. I said, "May I pray for you." He said "yes." I then said, "Father, in the name of Jesus Christ I ask you to heal Father Birmingham body mind and soul." Then, I placed my hand over his heart and said, "Father forgive him his sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, that he may have eternal life." Father Kelley and I helped Father Birmingham out of his chair and into his bed. I left at approximately 10 p.m.

10. Father Birmingham died the next morning.

11. I went to Father Birmingham's funeral later that week and saw Cardinal Bernard Law there. My friend encouraged me to go speak with him. We were in the basement of St. Brigid's Church after the funeral mass and I approached Cardinal Law, whose back was turned toward me. He was eating a small sandwich and drinking a cup of coffee.

12. I called his name and he turned around. I said, "Cardinal Law, my name is Tom Blanchette. I've never met you before." Cardinal Law did not shake my hand but nodded. I said, "I knew Father Birmingham in Sudbury, his first parish." Cardinal Law said, "Wonderful, very good, and you maintained a friendship through the years." I said, "No, though I sought him out last year here at the rectory and had a long conversation with him." Cardinal Law responded, "wonderful, wonderful." I told Cardinal Law that I

visited Father Birmingham had the hospital the night before he died. I said, "Cardinal Law, there will be a great number of young men in this diocese in need of counseling in the wake of their relationship with Father Birmingham." Cardinal Law asked, "what are you driving at?" I said, "Father Birmingham sexually molested me, my 4 brothers and dozens of other boys in Sudbury, and he told me that he was removed from ministry in Gloucester for molesting boys."

13. Cardinal Law touched me above my right elbow and said, "Come here, I want to talk to you." He directed me to an area in the middle of the floor where our conversation would not be overheard. He said, "As soon as I heard of this I removed him from ministry. You must believe me. I removed him as soon as I heard of this. He was put in residential treatment in Connecticut, then put essentially under house arrest here at the parish. He was not to have contact with teenagers or children at any time. He was allowed to go from the rectory to the church to say mass and return. He was not allowed to leave the grounds unaccompanied by an adult., He was not to be in the presence of children or young people at all."

14. Our conversation lasted for about 20-30 minutes. I went on to tell him about my conversation with Father Birmingham more than a year earlier and my conversation with him at Symmes Hospital.

15. I told Cardinal Law that I believed that God appointed me to Father Birmingham's deathbed in proxy for all the boys he had molested.

16. Cardinal Law told me that Bishop Banks was handling this matter and that he himself was not. I told him that the church has not only abrogated its responsibility to

the people but has abrogated its responsibility to the priest for not holding them accountable to their vows. I told the Cardinal that the church should go to the individual parishes to talk about sexual misconduct, repentance and reconciliation. I told him that most men that were sexually molested don't attend church but the church has an obligation to reach out to them all.

17. Cardinal Law repeated that he was not handling this matter and urged me to speak with Bishop Banks.

18. In conclusion, Cardinal Law said to me "May I pray for you?" I said, "yes." He placed his hands on my head. I was very moved to be prayed for by a Cardinal of the church, a prince of the church. Upon the conclusion of his prayers he said to me "I bind you by the power of the confessional not to speak to anyone else about this. We don't want to destroy the reputation of this good man's ministry." When he said that, my heart sunk. But not to detract from the sanctity of the moment, I said nothing. I thanked him and returned to a group of people who were waiting for me. Later, I drove to North Tewksbury where Father Birmingham was buried.

19. I did not ask for the sacrament of confession from Cardinal Law.

20. The next day, I called Bishop Banks and made an appointment to meet with him. It was either May 11th at 10 a.m. or May 10th at 11 a.m.

21. On the day of my appointment with Bishop Banks, I entered the Chancery and spoke with a receptionist who called Bishop Banks' office. He denied having an appointment with me. Nevertheless, he agreed to speak with me. He sat behind his desk and I sat opposite him. Our meeting lasted approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes. I told

him that I had spoken with him personally the day after Father Birmingham's funeral and that he told me to come at the appointed hour. He said he had no recollection of that conversation. I told him that I had spoken to Cardinal Law at Father Birmingham's funeral and that Cardinal Law had suggested I speak with Bishop Banks.

22. I told Bishop Banks about my conversation with Father Birmingham in Lexington and at Symmes Hospital. Bishop Banks asked me why it had taken me so long to come forward. I told him that it took me 25 years to get here. He said, "not many others have come forward but a group of women came to the Chancery from Salem in the 1960's.

23. I told Bishop Banks the same thing that I told Cardinal Law, that the church has abrogated its responsibility to the people of the church and its priests. I suggested that the church hold meetings in the respective parishes regarding sexual misconduct and Bishop Banks responded "that would be very expensive.

24. I told him that there were more than 100 boys in Sudbury who were abused by Father Birmingham. Bishop Banks' response was "but no one else has come forward from Sudbury." I later learned that two young boys from Sudbury and their fathers reported Father Birmingham to the Chancery in 1964.

25. After about 1 hour and 15 minutes Bishop Banks said, "I have already given you more than an hour of my time without an appointment. I have other things I need to do." I told him that the victims needed counseling. He told me that it was time for me to go. He never wrote down my name or telephone number and he took no notes of our meeting.

Signed this 18TH day of July, 2003, under the pains and penalties of perjury.

Thomas R. Blanchette
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