

THOMAS P. DOYLE, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.

9700 WOODLAND GLEN COURT, VIENNA, VIRGINIA 22182

July 4, 2011

Bishop Frank Dewane
Diocese of Venice
1000 Pinebrook Rd.
Venice FL 34285

Dear Bishop Dewane,

I am writing in reference to the matter of Chris Wilson or more precisely to the matter which led to his dismissal. I have been approached by several people directly involved and after hearing some of the information I decided to write to you.

The behavior of the young priest while in the context of sacramental confession was, if the reports are accurate, highly inappropriate at the very least. However of far greater importance is the fact that this behavior is similar to that used by other priests in the process of grooming potential targets for sexual abuse. I have studied the files of thousands of clergy abuse cases from the U.S. and other countries for twenty-five years. I have served as a consultant and expert witness on more cases than I can remember from dioceses and religious communities throughout the U.S., in Canada, the U.K., Ireland, Australia, Belgium and New Zealand.

In a scandalously significant number of these cases, the priest used the sacrament of penance as part of the grooming process or even worse, as the venue for the sexual molestation itself. I have consulted with others involved in the issue and all agree that the line of questioning and the threat to withhold absolution have not been uncommon as a prelude to sexual violation. In spite of the hard evidence of this misuse of the sacrament I know of no bishop who has pursued a canonical case on suspicion of solicitation in the confessional.

The most thorough canonical commentaries on solicitation are found among the authors who wrote on the legislation found in the 1917 Code. In addition there are several scholarly studies of solicitation cases recorded by the Spanish, Mexican, Venezuelan and Roman Inquisitions, some of which took place during the final years before the Inquisition was replaced by the Holy Office. Many of the commentators agree that detailed and unnecessary question about sexual matters can constitute the substance of solicitation. Some have referred to it as a species of oral voyeurism. There are similar findings from among the cases pursued by the Inquisition.

All of this is not to say that any detailed questioning about sexual matters constitutes a form of solicitation or grooming. Nevertheless there is reason to have pursued an investigation

rather than dismiss the reports outright. In far too many instances of confirmed sexual abuse in the recent past, complaints and warnings by individual penitents, their parents or responsible teachers such as Chris Wilson went unheeded. The result was seriously damaging to the victims and to the institutional Church as well.

Although I suspect that you will dismiss this letter and its contents as irrelevant and intrusive I would suggest otherwise. If nothing else at least consider the possibility that the actions of the priest were more than those of a poorly instructed confessor.

Sincerely,

Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.