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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

MOST REVEREND LEO E. O'NEIL, D.D.

September 13, 1995

Most Rev. Leon A. Tharmaraj
Bishop of Kottar
Bishop's House
P. B. No. 17
Nagercoil - 629 001
INDIA

Dear Bishop Leon:

I write to you to ask for a clarification, one that is extremely important.

In your confidential letter to me of July 27, 1995, you indicated that Father Hilary did indeed have "some problem with alcohol" and at least "one case proved" of problems with girls. Based on this information, I instructed my Chancellor, Msgr. Christian, to inform Father Hilary that we could not offer him ministry in the diocese that would be permanent because of the number of priests we will be ordaining next year. Obviously, the real reasons for our refusal of ministry were the problems mentioned above, but we wished to maintain your confidentiality in the matter, as requested.

Father Hilary began actively, with the help of Toni Epaphras, to attempt to find ministry in the area and even arranged certain interviews. At this point, Msgr. Christian met again with Father Hilary and told him that subsequent to their previous conversation, the diocese had become aware of allegations regarding his drinking and sexual problems. Msgr. Christian did not reveal the source of this information although Father Hilary assumed it was from other priests of your diocese currently working in the United States. He denied the allegations and Msgr. Christian told him that there was no way that we could offer him ministry unless he obtained a letter from you clearing his name.

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Obviously, it was our intention in this regard to have you corroborate the information in your previous letter. Since you have not done that and in fact have contradicted it, it puts me in a very difficult situation. On the one hand, I would like to respect your confidentiality, but on the other hand, I am very uncomfortable offering Father Hilary ministry in light of the allegations you confirmed.

Keeping in mind the seriousness of the situation in the United States, and the terrible scandal and perhaps civil liabilities that could come to the Church if Father Hilary is knowingly allowed to function with an unresolved history of these problems, could you please send me immediately some clarification of the apparent contradiction in your letters of July 27 and September 6.

Thanking you for your kind assistance in this regard, I am

Your friend in Christ,

+ *Leo E. O'Neil*

Bishop of Manchester