

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Office of Professional Responsibility



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ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO
OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

MEMORANDUM

To: File - PFR-170
From: Leah McCluskey, Professional Responsibility Administrator
Re: Bennett, Rev. Joseph [Active] [REDACTED]
Date: November 3, 2004

PRA and Mrs. Mayra Flores of Assistance Ministry met with Ms. [REDACTED] on September 7, 2004 regarding her sisters' [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] allegations of sexual misconduct against Rev. Joseph Bennett. As requested by Ms. [REDACTED] the meeting took place at her hair salon [REDACTED] located at [REDACTED] in Chicago.

After introductions were made, PRA provided Ms. [REDACTED] with information regarding the Office of Professional Responsibility, as well as a copy of §1100 *Sexual Abuse of Minors: Policies for Education, Prevention, Assistance to Victims and Procedures for Determination of Fitness for Ministry*. Ms. [REDACTED] was then asked to begin wherever she felt most comfortable sharing her memories of her sisters and Fr. Bennett.

Ms. [REDACTED] began by stating that at this point in time, her recollections are that she was a "bystander" during the time period that Fr. Bennett allegedly abused her older sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. She does not have any memories at this time of herself being abused by the cleric. As per Ms. [REDACTED] when [REDACTED] began to disclose the abuse by Fr. Bennett, she began to relate her own recollections [from her childhood].

Ms. [REDACTED] showed Mrs. Flores and PRA a picture of her and [REDACTED] on their First Communion, which took place at St. John de LaSalle. She was between seven and eight years old at the time. Ms. [REDACTED] shared that her mother held her sister [REDACTED] back in school one year so that [REDACTED] could be with her in class. As per Ms. [REDACTED] she was painfully shy as a child and her mother felt that [REDACTED] being in the same First Communion class with her would be a help. Ms. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were in the same CCD class at St. John de LaSalle so that they could make their First Communion together.

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Ms. [REDACTED] father worked evenings, so between 3:00pm and 4:00pm her mother would be making dinner for him and such so that he could get ready and leave for work. As a result, Ms. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had to wait in the classroom after CCD for approximately 20-30 minutes until their mother could pick them up. Ms. [REDACTED] recalls waiting by herself and that she did not like doing so. She recalls that [REDACTED] was not with her waiting because she [REDACTED] had to do something after CCD class downstairs. At the time [REDACTED] was "the favorite," so it was not unusual for her to be asked to do something extra after class. When asked later in the meeting by PRA, Ms. [REDACTED] stated that she recalls there being a door at the bottom of the stairs [in the school where CCD was held] and that she waited a lot at the top of the stairs as she was told. Again when asked, Ms. [REDACTED] stated that she does remember knowing that she had to wait at the top of the stairs, but not who told her to wait there.

Ms. [REDACTED] remembers one occasion when she was scared while waiting at the top of the stairs and feeling that she really wanted her sister [REDACTED] with her. As a result, Ms. [REDACTED] went downstairs, where she was told not to go. She recalls that [REDACTED] ran out from somewhere and opened and closed the door [located at the bottom of the stairs]. Ms. [REDACTED] stated that [REDACTED] did not have her veil on and as a result, saw the nun's short, coarse hair. She also recalls watching [REDACTED] adjusting her skirt and the buttons on her blouse. At the time, Ms. [REDACTED] was "...really upset and crying..." and [REDACTED] told her that all was well and that there was nothing to worry about.

Ms. [REDACTED] then shared another memory of being in the basement hall outside of the CCD classroom. She recalls crying, being scared and upset, and backing away from vestments. Ms. [REDACTED] backed herself into a coat rack and fell. After falling, she remembers being comforted by [REDACTED]

Ms. [REDACTED] spoke of [REDACTED] [please refer to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] allegations against Fr. Bennett]. She recalls visiting [REDACTED] often with her sisters and their mother and that the woman gave them Irish sweaters as gifts. Ms. [REDACTED] described [REDACTED] as one of her mother's dearest friends. As per Ms. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] took care of the priests at St. John de LaSalle. She stated that [REDACTED] was an elf-like woman with an Irish brogue, which made her difficult to understand. As Ms. [REDACTED] mother attended church at St. John de La Salle every morning, she and [REDACTED] became good friends, and in turn became friendly with Fr. Bennett.

Ms. [REDACTED] spoke of a time when she, [REDACTED] and their mother went to visit [REDACTED]. They sat in the kitchen of St. John de LaSalle rectory and had orange juice and coffeeecake. Ms. [REDACTED] recalls Fr. Bennett being present and taking [REDACTED] with him into the back area of the rectory to see the scapulas/medals in his bedroom area.

Ms. [REDACTED] spoke of another time when she, [REDACTED] their mother, and [REDACTED] were out to dinner. She and her family had moved out of Pullman and to Worth by then and Fr. Bennett had been assigned to Our Lady of the Ridge [According to Archdiocesan Archives, Fr. Bennett was assigned to Our Lady of the Ridge from 1973 through 1976].

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Ms. [REDACTED] then shared that [REDACTED] attended morning mass with their mother often. At this point in the meeting, Ms. [REDACTED] apologized to Mrs. Flores and PRA for being "scattered" in terms of time frames and the memories that she was sharing.

Ms. [REDACTED] stated that her mother passed away seven years ago. She spoke of a Fr. Pat who was a good friend of her mother's who is now assigned to St. Christina's [According to the current Archdiocesan Directory, there is no priest listed as assigned to St. Christina's with the first name Pat or Patrick]. As per Ms. [REDACTED] her mother "mothered" Pat and "...pushed him in the direction to become a priest." Upon the passing of her mother, she called Fr. Pat and Fr. Bennett, to request that they con-celebrate the funeral mass at St. Albert the Great. She shared that Fr. Pat was more than happy to say the mass. When she called Fr. Bennett about her mother's death and the funeral mass, she was shocked that the cleric did not remember her mother. As per Ms. [REDACTED] she spoke to Fr. Bennett at that time about [REDACTED] and St. John de LaSalle. She shared with Mrs. Flores and PRA that Fr. Bennett had been to her family's homes [in Pullman and in Worth] for dinner in the past. Referring back to the time when her mother passed away, Ms. [REDACTED] stated that she was upset and grieving when speaking with Fr. Bennett. She stated that Fr. Bennett agreed to say the funeral mass [with Fr. Pat]. Shortly prior to the funeral mass, Ms. [REDACTED] brought Fr. Bennett family pictures, which included her mother and father to share with him. She stated that Fr. Bennett looked at the pictures quickly and then told her that he was sorry for her loss.

PRA thanked Ms. [REDACTED] for all that she had shared of her memories of Fr. Bennett's involvement with her and her family. She then agreed to answer clarification questions for PRA.

When asked, Ms. [REDACTED] stated that she is unsure of who taught the CCD class at St. John de LaSalle that she and [REDACTED] attended. She does recall that [REDACTED] was the "singing nun," and also has memories of the nun playing the guitar. In regards to Fr. Bennett, she remembers him to be "stoic" and not one to say much. She referred to her memories of her mother taking a picture of her and [REDACTED] with Fr. Bennett. Ms. [REDACTED] stated that [REDACTED] has the picture and that it looks as if Fr. Bennett is attempting to move out of the shot as it was being taken.

Ms. [REDACTED] described her mother as very religious and her father as a Lutheran who "went with the flow." Her father would attend Catholic mass on Sundays with the family, but he never converted to Catholicism.

While living in Worth, Ms. [REDACTED] remembers talking with her mother about the media coverage of the sexual abuse of minors by priests. She stated that her mother remarked that the allegations [against all priests] were not true and felt that "...it would all come out that people [who alleged abuse] were lying." Ms. [REDACTED] recalls that her mother was upset and offended with the media coverage of people alleging that they were abused by priests.

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When Ms. [REDACTED] and her siblings were growing up, their mother taught them that priests walked on water. As a result of these teachings, Ms. [REDACTED] feels that if [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] told their mother something regarding the abuse by Fr. Bennett, they would not be believed. Ms. [REDACTED] added her feeling that her mother would not have believed any of them if anyone had anything negative to say about a priest or a nun. She described her mother as sweet, innocent, and naïve. Ms. [REDACTED] then shared that if her parents were not dead, this [the abuse of her sisters by Fr. Bennett] would kill them.

Referring back to her childhood, Ms. [REDACTED] shared that [REDACTED] was the most book smart of the five children in the family. Ms. [REDACTED] also shared that it was easy to play a practical joke or "pull one over on" [REDACTED]. As a result of her sister's intelligence, Ms. [REDACTED] has always thought that [REDACTED] would become a lawyer or a doctor. Ms. [REDACTED] shared that [REDACTED] was always outgoing as well. As per Ms. [REDACTED] when [REDACTED] did not become a doctor or a lawyer, she was surprised and disappointed. Ms. [REDACTED] shared that [REDACTED] struggled with concentration when she was in college. [REDACTED] was earning good grades, but dropped out of school, even when she was attending classes at Moraine Valley [Junior College].

Ms. [REDACTED] described [REDACTED] as a devout Catholic as an adult. As per Ms. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is active in church, prayer meetings, and is "...a big church go-er." [REDACTED] has always been a prayerful person and does quote from the bible.

Ms. [REDACTED] then spoke of the current state of her family and their feelings of discomfort that Fr. Bennett is still in a parish [Holy Ghost]. She stated that she has been extremely close to going to Holy Ghost to speak with Fr. Bennett. Ms. [REDACTED] shared that her sisters' abuse by Fr. Bennett has been devastating to their family. She remarked that if her father and brother were still alive today, Fr. Bennett would not be currently active in a parish. She described her family as close-knit and shared that Fr. Bennett's abuse has ruined the lives of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Ms. [REDACTED] stated that both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have suffered from depression and have been suicidal. She described herself as a backbone for her sisters.

Ms. [REDACTED] spoke of phone calls that she has had with [REDACTED] where she [REDACTED] has been suicidal. She has often wondered if the next phone call she receives is to inform her that [REDACTED] is dead. As a result of her sisters' abuse, work and friends have not been "first" for Ms. [REDACTED]. The abuse by Fr. Bennett has been "...a very big thorn" in her family's side.

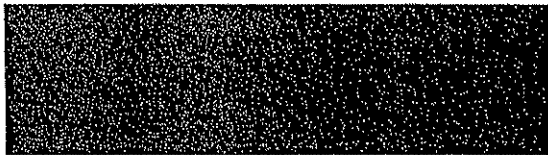
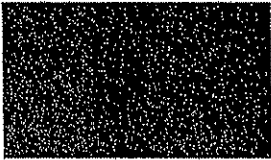
Ms. [REDACTED] shared that she has done well for herself, but feels guilty that her sisters have not. She owns her own business, property, and a summer home. Ms. [REDACTED] recently bought [REDACTED] a new car as well. She wants her sisters to have happy, normal lives and to function as normal people, which devastates her. At this point in the meeting, Ms. [REDACTED] became visibly emotional. Up until this point, she had been able to speak clearly and directly regarding the memories of her childhood involving Fr. Bennett and her sisters' difficulties as a result of the alleged abuse.

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Ms. [REDACTED] stated that the past year has been very difficult and that "pieces of the puzzle" have been coming together. She shared that she is fearful that she may have a "weird" memory [involving Fr. Bennett], but does not think that she will.

PRA thanked Ms. [REDACTED] for sharing all that she had regarding Fr. Bennett and her sisters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Ms. [REDACTED] may be reached at the following:



11/10/04
Date

Leah McCluskey
Leah McCluskey, Administrator

11/16/04
Date

Mayra Flores
Mayra Flores, Assistance Ministry

11/16/04
Date

Cc: Review Board Members
Rev. Daniel Smilanic, Cardinal's Delegate to the Review Board
Rev. James Kaczorowski, Vicar for Priests
Ralph Bonaccorsi, Assistance Ministry

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