

February 24, 1974

Dear Cardinal Medeiros:

I begin this letter to you at midnight on February 23d overwhelmed and exhausted by the scope and complexity of the problems facing me in my Ministry.

Requests for lectures, seminars and consultations to colleges, churches, hot-lines, and all other types of agencies dealing with young people pour in daily, not only from Greater Boston but from across the country.

Clergy and Seminarians disturbed about their own sexuality call at all hours of the night.

Parish clergy continually call to refer young people to me expressing their own feelings of inadequacy to deal with sexual "deviation".

The heartbreak and even injury coming to people who attempt to enter the visible gay scene unassisted and without proper orientation haunts me.

The attempts to coordinate and inspire the leaders of the gay community in concerted efforts exhaust me.

Sick and elderly gays make incessant demands upon my time.

Gay couples seeking to strengthen the bonds which have taken them out of isolation, despair and even promiscuity turn to me for support and guidance.

Hysterical parents of young people having discovered the sexual orientation of their children besiege me in their efforts to understand.

The adolescent children of parents involved in the gay scene cry out for a specialized and intensive type of assistance which few others are trained to provide.

The heterosexual spouses of gay married people require hours and hours of my time and tell me there is no one to whom they can turn whether friends, family or professional counselors.

Gay people in prison, jails, half-way houses and reform schools write to me terrified at the dangers to which they are exposed.

The injustice and unfair treatment given to gay people in the administration of justice cries out to God for vengeance.

The lack of decent places to gather leads gay people to the bars, exposure to alcoholism, blackmail and brutality, inevitable in ghettoizing any disenfranchised group.

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Gay children in need of foster and adoptive homes continue to wander the halls of institutions simply because there is no foster or adoptive home in the State of Massachusetts willing to take a gay youngster. There is no half-way house in Massachusetts which feels comfortable in taking a gay despite numerous attempts on my part.

Gay drug people continue to find few allies among those legislators who fear recriminations from their constituency.

Gay parolees coming out of prison find themselves at sea because of the lack of half-way houses willing to take them.

Suicide has become the number one killer of gay high school youths. The almost incredible accretion of scientific research in the field of sexual variations remains on the bookshelves for lack of systems of dissemination. Outreach programs are non-existent.

The 100,000 gay people in the Greater Boston area to whom I set out to minister has multiplied many times over. Obviously there are 200,000 parents of gay people. There are the wives of gay people, the husbands of gay people, the children of gay people, the friends of gay people, all of whom seek the ministrations and education unavailable to them in the parishes.

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To whom can I bring this pain of suffering other than to the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston, and so it was that I turned to you in the early days of your accession. The first time I left your office on the eve. of your Cardinalite, you threw your arms around me, embracing me and said "Paul, don't let anyone discourage you. I believe in what you are doing." But I am discouraged and my discouragement flows not only from the weight and nature of the plight of the people mentioned above, but primarily from my last meeting with you. In your letter to me making that last appointment, you said "rather than respond in writing to the many requests you make, I think it would be more appropriate to meet with you." Yet only one request did you refer to and that was - the building. My one hour appointment was cut to a half hour and you informed me that there was another Cardinal waiting for you; that you had a headache; that you wanted the Chancellor to sit in to be a witness, and you proceeded to use the major portion of the time lecturing me on moral theology, over which ground we had been before, and the orthodoxy of my position I had thought to have been established. You allowed me no time for rejoinder. You had a headache and it was obvious that I was simply another burden, perhaps the last of a long day.

Although you had my four page letter before you, never once did you refer to anything in it; my request for a regular meeting time once a month; my difficulties with The Boston Pilot; my frustration at never being consulted by any one of my superiors; the lengthy list of needs of approximately 100,000 people in your Diocese, etc. You spent but a brief moment in concern for my protestation that I was in danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people seeking my help. When you finished finally going over the grounds

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again of moral theology, you simply told me that you had no buildings and dismissed me.

As I stood for 25 minutes in front of your house waiting for a streetcar, it was difficult for me to believe the change which had come over you in the interim between our first and second meetings. One thing, however, was clear - you no longer considered me a helpmate in your attempts to be the Vicar of Christ in this region, but rather a burden to be dispensed with as soon as possible. I have lived now these many weeks since that meeting torn between the obligation of loyalty to my Bishop and compassion for my people for whom my Bishop obviously has no time. This week two people have told me of letters they have received from you intimating that you do not approve of the Mass I have weekly for gay people but prefer and insist that they integrate themselves into the parish churches. It is so simple a solution and yet it is no solution at all. It is like telling Blacks in Roxbury that they cannot have a Black Church but should integrate into the white parishes. It is the ~~same~~ people who should be told of your desire for integration of gay people. Tonight I contemplate closing down my Mass, calling suburban pastors and pleading for the right to bring my people in a body to their parishes, but to do this I would need your assistance, and I tremble at the thought of the violence which awaits us, and wonder whether you truly wish to assume responsibility for such a consequence of your decision. The upper room at Interfaith where Mass has struggled on those many months is no longer large enough, and Interfaith is closing.

Will you help me to get decent quarters, or must we be reduced to accepting the offer of a gay bar to hold Mass in the bar before it opens in the evening?

At the risk of offending you, I must tell you that I have even contemplated with the arrival of good weather of asking you to allow me to have Mass on the lawn of your Residence hoping that under your aegis and with your protection it could be carried out without violence from the Catholic community. You reach out to prisons filled with criminals, rapists, murderers, men incarcerated for crimes of violence; you reach out to Pine Street Inn filled with alcoholic derelicts, yet for my gentle, productive, God-fearing people you have only moral theology to offer me. You have alarm and concern for what you deem to be their sins of impurity, and silence for the inexpressibly greater sins against charity visited upon them by the Catholic community. The disproportionate concern for the violation of one lesser virtue while ignoring the violations of the queen of virtues, infinitely more outrageous in the sight of God is not even good moral theology.

In a letter from you concerning the Holy Year, you said "always and everywhere the Church is bound to strive for renewal, for conversions, for greater openness on the part of all of its members to Divine Mercy and Divine Love." Could it possibly be that that love and that mercy cannot extend to the homosexuals? You said, "I have in mind especially those who have stopped Church attendance and have thus cut themselves off from the Church's sacramental life..." "I am most anxious that dialogue be opened up with all those in our respective parishes who are not with us on Sundays and whose presence we miss so much. Let us hear with sensitivity and understanding the complaints which they may have against society, church, clergy, liturgy. We may hear something which God wants us to hear." Do you really miss the presence of the homosexuals so much? Are you willing to dialogue with them? Do you truly hold yourself open to hearing something which God wants you to hear? If only as you say "it may merely be a deeper

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understanding of the anxiety felt by his neighbor." "For others", you say "in positions of leadership, it may require the initiation or development of programs of dialogue." Our meeting, yours and mine, was no dialogue. Are you willing and ready to dialogue with gay Catholics? Will you set up a time to talk with me and them together, at your convenience?

To those leaders in the gay community who have written to you seeking an audience, you have responded that Father Shanley is your emissary and since you cannot see everyone desiring a meeting with you, they are to bring their needs to him and he in turn will carry those needs to you. Yet when I attempt to do so, there is no listening, there is no dialogue. There is simply concentration upon the least important of the problems of gay people. When you go to Pine Street Inn, whether the drinking habits of that population are the result of sin or sickness, you put them aside for the moment. You do not preach to them of the evils of liquor. You see them as desperate, destitute men in need of your comfort, concern and compassion. I plead with you to extend your arm a bit further to embrace my people. They want to be your people. They are bitter, confused and rejected as they look at the House of their Father - the Catholic Church. Jesus was condemned because He ate and drank with sinners. Would you be willing to sit down and eat and drink with these "sinners" were I to invite you to a gathering of gay people? Jesus when confronted with impure persons seemed always to be more concerned with showing love than condemnation, thus opening Himself to the charge of condoning impurities. Will you do that?

A Monsignor whom I respect and admire, recently said to me "I admit that the Church has savagely abused homosexuals throughout history but tell me what is your position on the morality of homosexual acts?" I was astonished. It was like saying to me "Paul, I admit we have put six million Jews in the ovens, but tell me what is your position on the morality of theft in concentration camps?" The homophobic concentration on the virtue of purity is hardly Christ-like and theologically imprecise. Will you admit the savage abuse? Will we Catholics publicly beg the forgiveness of the homosexual? The Church is ever so loud in its concern for life these days. Pulpits are jammed with Priests declaiming the evil of abortion; public Masses are said; demonstrations are organized; letters are written; The Pilot's pages are full of articles. Where is the concern for the life of my people? Not long ago, a young gay man was taken to South Boston, beaten and then a car driven over his legs, backed up, driven forward, this repeated four times until his legs were crushed beyond repair and he left an invalid for life. Silence from the Church! More recently a young gay man was taken to the Arnold Arboretum, beaten senseless, his body stuffed into a sewer where he drowned. His abductors are still at large. Silence from the Clergy! Mr. Loeb, Publisher of a New Hampshire newspaper foments violence and hatred for the homosexual whom he depicts as an animal. Silence from the Church and the Clergy of New Hampshire! A young, teenage gay boy is torched to death in South Boston in his apartment. Silence from the Clergy! A transvestite is murdered in Charlestown. Silence!

Your actions speak so loud, I cannot hear what you say. The life of one of my gay people is as dear in the sight of God as the life of an unborn baby. I accuse the Catholic Clergy of playing to the gallery rather than of concern for the right to life. Were they to speak the truth, those few who see the truth, unclouded by the

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homophobia which they have learned from their earliest days, they fear the loss of respect and the consequent refusal of their people to listen on other matters. I understand this but I condemn it and I lay these tragedies and countless other ones occurring nightly on your doorstep. I plead with you not to tell me what you cannot do, but to tell me what you will do; to discuss with me the sins of your people rather than the sins of mine; to have the courage to begin for gay people what Martin Luther King had the courage to begin for Black people. For once let the Catholic Church be in the vanguard of a movement to alleviate the suffering of a "savagely abused" minority.

Perhaps if I end this letter "respectfully yours", you will consider that hypocritical in light of the foregoing, yet it is with all sincerity that I can say that. I do respect you; I do understand your plight; I do consider you a man of compassion; a man of courage; else there were no need to write this letter.

Respectfully yours,

*(Rev.) Paul R. Shanley*

\* The number of urgent telephone calls is increasing daily with a peak load yesterday, March 14, of 100 calls. I plead with you for advice and assistance and an opportunity to sit down with you again.