

February 9, 1979

His Eminence Humberto Cardinal Medeiros
Cardinal's Residence
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Your Eminence:

On Friday, February 2, 1979, I read in the Boston Globe an article in reference to Rev. Paul Shanley. I do not know Fr. Shanley personally, (although some of the years I attended St. John's Seminary during the '50's may have coincided with his,) and I am not writing to you on his behalf. However, in this article Fr. Shanley quotes you as follows, "He said homosexuals don't need any special help from priests because all priests are trained to deal with homosexuals in the confessional." I would like to comment.

I grew up in a Catholic home, attended a parochial grammar school, and a diocesan high school. In those days there was little or no discussion of sexuality in the home. Attempts to explore such questions in the confessional were either misunderstood or ignored. And one classroom session with the priest-guidance counsellor in our Junior year was all that the high school offered. With this background, confused about my own sexuality and thinking I might have a priestly vocation, I entered St. John's Seminary. At the end of my first year I had a homosexual experience with an upper classman. We acknowledged this to our confessor, but there were no attempts on his part to deal with it, although he continued as my spiritual director for another year. Two teenagers were left to deal with the problem as best they could. We were able to clarify our relationship. The other young man went on to ordination and, I pray, is having a fruitful ministry. However, in a total of six years at St. John's I was never able to get any guidance in my efforts to understand my own sexuality nor was I exposed to any intelligent discussions of it in the confessional, spiritual conferences, or the classroom. It is difficult for me to believe that my classmates were prepared to understand either themselves or others in the short sixteen months that elapsed between the time of my departure from the seminary until their priestly ordination.

After leaving the seminary I continued to have difficulty finding any priest willing to discuss questions of sexual identity. This was true both of the chaplains I encountered in the military and the parish priests at home. For some years I led a very confused life, now out of the shelter of the seminary, but not feeling adequate for the married life. In those years I frequented places in the city where homosexuals gathered. During that time I encountered at least six of my former classmates who had all been ordained. I met each of them on more than one occasion and knew them to be actively engaged in homosexual activity. To my knowledge one of them has recently been in difficulty with non-ecclesiastical superiors for homosexual activity. I do not mention any of this to judge or condemn. I do it only to illustrate that there is a severe problem which needs more than prayerful attention. If the

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priests engaged in priestly formation are ill-equipped to handle such issues, how can we expect the priests sent into the parishes to be able to give guidance? And if six priests known to me from one seminary class have questions about their sexuality, how many more might there be?

Your Eminence, I would have preferred to have discussed this openly with you in person. Since I did not know how to arrange that I am writing this letter. Please understand if I do not sign it. After many years I have achieved a certain peace and understanding. Yet I am not understanding or humble enough to risk embarrassment to myself and family if this were read by others for whom it was not intended.

Forgive me if my interpretation of the newspaper quote was erroneous. Perhaps you are more aware than I know of the great need for enlightened guidance and counselling for a certain portion of your flock both clerical and lay. I certainly hope so, and offer my continued prayers for your successful ministry.

Incidentally in the matter of Fr. Shanley. Should you pursue your directive to him to engage in regular parish work, it will be a fortunate parish which can provide an understanding priest for its youth, even if he does not have all the answers.

Your Eminence, I do know that very few priests are trained to deal with homosexuals in the confessional. I do know that there is a very real need for this guidance. Until such time as all priests are prepared for this work I would be delighted to read in the Pilot (not the Globe) that the Archdiocese of Boston recognizes the need and will deal with it with some sort of enlightened ministry.

My prayers for you and all your priests.