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APOSTOLIC DELEGATION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONFIDENTIAL
SUBJECT TO COURT ORDER

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20008

No 1874/66

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

9 April 1966

Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, DD
Bishop of Bridgeport
250 Waldemere Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Your Excellency:

I have a letter from Mrs. F-004 [redacted], [redacted], Fairfield, which gives me grave concern. In it there are serious allegations about the baneful influence of the Reverend Lawrence Brett on her son, M-002.

I understand further that Your Excellency has some knowledge of the situation so that I confidently write for your comment. I shall appreciate also a suggestion concerning the reply that I can make to Mrs. F-004 [redacted].

With cordial regards and best wishes,

I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ G. Lagnozzi

Apostolic Delegate

April 27, 1966

No. 1874/66

The Most Reverend Egidio Vagnozzi, D.D.
Apostolic Delegate to the United States
3339 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20008

Your Excellency:

Responding to your letter of 9 April, 1966 (Prot. No. 1874/66) regarding one of our priests, the Reverend Laurence Brett, I should like to present the following summary of this situation.

About the first of this year Mr. and Mrs. M-004 came to the Chancery Office and asked the Chancellor, Msgr. John Toomey, if the Diocese would help pay the cost of psychiatric care for their son, M-002, aged 17, a fourth-year student at Notre Dame Boys' High School, Bridgeport. They explained that their boy was hospitalized in a State mental institution, but they wished him to have private facilities with better care in a private institution. Private care, however, was beyond their means. They expressed their conviction that their boy's psychiatric problem had its origin in an incident involving a young priest of the Diocese, Father Laurence Brett, who had been a friend and counsellor to their son. Because they blamed this priest for their son's illness, they considered that the Diocese had an obligation, if not to take full responsibility, at least to assist by gift or loan in paying for his treatment.

The boy's hospitalization was the climax of about two years of very erratic behavior shown in emotional outbursts, periods of disobedience, antagonism towards the parents, disappearances from home, threats to do harm to others. All this had been inexplicable to the parents since the boy, who is apparently of superior intelligence, had passed a very normal and serene childhood. Only at the time of the committment to the hospital in December, 1965, did they discover, they said, what they regarded as the cause of the trouble, namely, the incident with Father Brett.

According to their report, this incident had taken place about two years previously. In a private conversation with M-002 during an outing with M-002 and some other boys, Father Brett said something which the boy interpreted as a

solicitation to homosexual misconduct. The boy was thoroughly shocked at the impression he received. No misconduct actually occurred. That was the extent of the incident. The association between M-002 and the priest terminated. The boy, however, remained disturbed and grew resentful toward the priest and toward all "homosexuals." He discussed the matter with a few of his friends and with his older brother, but neither he nor anyone else at the time reported the incident to the parents or to anyone in authority.

In or about October of 1964, around a year afterward, the boy finally brought the incident to the attention of the pastor of the parish where Father Brett was in residence. The pastor took the report non-committally and advised the boy to tell the story to no one else. The pastor apparently did not judge the report sufficiently serious or urgent to pass it on to anyone else. At any rate, it did not come to me while I was at the Vatican Council in Rome during that period.

However, by a coincidence, as it seems, Father Brett was shortly afterward taken off active duty. This was the result of a complaint made in November, 1964, by the father of a male student at Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport where Father Brett was then spiritual director. When confronted with this accusation, by Msgr. William Kearney, Vicar General of the Diocese, (before my return from the Council) Father Brett confessed to a homosexual attack upon this university student. He was immediately relieved of all priestly duties. Upon my return from Rome in early December I assigned him to the Via Coeli institution. After a short stay there, with the approval of the superiors, he was sent to Nazareth Hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to be placed under psychiatric care. After a period of psychiatric treatment anduupon the advice of the attending doctor, I permitted him to leave the hospital in the expectation that he would be able to serve as a priest somewhere on the West Coast. Unfortunately, the place that he had in mind was not suitable since he needed continuing treatment on an out-patient basis and the place in question was not near a good psychiatrist. Father Brett therefore returned to the East and lived at home with his aunt and did not receive another appointment in the Diocese of Bridgeport. While I was still considering whether it would be possible to assign Father Brett to our diocese again in view of the fact that the original incident caused no publicity, the matter of M-002 was brought to my attention. As a result I knew that in spite of the doctor's favorable report it would not be possible for me to continue the services of Father Brett on an active basis in our Diocese for many years to come. Subsequently since he had been contacting other bishops with a view to working for some years in their diocese, Archbishop Davis of Santa Fe wrote for a confidential report on Father Brett's activities. I have not yet sent the report but I understand from a letter from Father Brett that he is serving at least on a temporary basis in that archdiocese. Archbishop Davis has indicated a willingness to continue him if my report would not stand in the way.

In the original complaint against Father Brett the name of M-002 was not mentioned. In the interview, however, with Msgr. Kearney, when he admitted the homosexual attack upon another student, Father Brett seemed to indicate

that there was at least one other incident. I have no way of knowing whether this might have been the case of M-002 or not.

M-002 probably became aware of Father Brett's disappearance from the diocese because the high school is close to the university. However, I doubt that he knew the precise reason since the incident involving the university student did not become known, and the departure of Father Brett was accomplished very quietly. Factually, in February of 1964 Father Brett had been hospitalized for an attack of hepatitis and in April was released a second time after a relapse in health for this same problem. Hence those who knew him would have judged that his health had failed again. M-002 of course could have judged that Father's transfer was brought about by this complaint of M-002 himself. In any case the boy continued to behave strangely, according to his parents, brooding constantly over his unhappy experience. Yet he continued to withhold from his parents any admission of the subject which troubled his thoughts. Finally, more than a year later, at the time of his hospitalization, M-002 recounted the event to his parents.

When informed by our Right Reverend Chancellor with whom the M-002's family chose to deal of the claims made by them upon the Diocese, I judged that I could not agree with these claims.

In the first place there is no evidence that the incident is actually the cause of their son's emotional illness. In fact I have no direct proof that Father Brett is guilty in this incident relating to the M-002 boy. In any case I have not been informed of any medical diagnosis which says that the boy's emotional state was caused by this claimed misconduct. On the contrary there are indications that the boy's fundamental trouble lies elsewhere. A competent observer of the case confidentially noted two things for the Chancellor. First, the family has moved several times during M-002's lifetime. Thus the boy has been subjected to the difficulty of adjusting to many different schools, many sets of friends. This could very likely have interfered with his emotional development. leaving him with a sense of insecurity. Secondly, the boy seems not to relate well to this father, and in fact to bear a positive hostility toward him, indicating, perhaps, a deficiency of male influence in his emotional development and a consequent latent tendency toward homosexuality which he is violently resisting. What the current diagnosis is I do not know. It therefore seems to me that the incident with Father Brett, if it actually took place and serious though it could be, can at most have been the occasion of the emotional breakdown. The trouble itself is surely more deeply seated.

Secondly, I disagree with the claim of the M-002's family that the pastor where Father Brett resided was negligent in not informing the parents immediately of the incident reported to him by their son. The pastor had no clear duty to consult the parents on a problem which he thought would be solved otherwise.

Nor was the Diocese of Bridgeport negligent, as the parents hint, since it was unaware of the incident.

The Diocese has given no information to the M-002's family on the reason for Father Brett's absence. They claim however to know of the priest's psychiatric problem, but no admission of this has ever been made to them.

It is therefore my feeling that the Diocese of Bridgeport should not assume any responsibility in this case, unfortunate though it be. Likewise, since competent psychiatric care for the boy is available through the State of Connecticut, the Diocese of Bridgeport should not assume any burden of assisting with private care.

These decisions I communicated to the M-002's family through the Right Reverend Chancellor with whom they had been discussing the matter. When subsequently they requested an appointment with me, I sent word that I anticipated no change in my position, but that if they wished, I would see them the week following their request. They did not reapply for the appointment. The next I heard in the matter was Your Excellency's letter.

I trust that this letter has sufficiently set down the details and background to guide Your Excellency in replying to the letter from Mrs. F-004. If there is anything further fYour Excellency wishes to know in this matter, or if there is any action which you would wish me to take, I shall be happy to cooperate.

May I finally note that my delay in replying was occasioned by an accident which occurred to our Chancellor which kept him from the office where this information was on file.

With every best personal wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Walter fWalter W. Curtis,
Bishop of Bridgeport

CONFIDENTIAL
SUBJECT TO COURT ORDER

APOSTOLIC DELEGATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20008

No. 1874/66

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

28 April 1966

Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, DD
Bishop of Bridgeport
250 Waldemere Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Your Excellency:

Your letter of yesterday recounts so sad a story that the writing of it must have caused you great heaviness of heart. We expect failures in our life but we never become accoustomed to experiences as sordid as that involving one of the younger priests of Bridgeport.

I am anxious, too, for the M-002's family that there may be manifested to them the concern and understanding they expect from their father in Christ. Even though the responsibility of Father has not been demonstrated, they believe that he was an important contributor to M-002's condition. They obviously now need reassurance that the Church is interested. In this situation I believe that it will be helpful if Your Excellency receives them and tries to be as sympathetic as possible. Such an expression of pastoral concern may relieve them while an official attitude may leave them bitter.

With cordial regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ A. Lagnozz

Apostolic Delegate

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CONFIDENTIAL
SUBJECT TO COURT ORDER

July 27, 1966

No. 1874/66

The Most Reverend Egidio Vagnozzi, D. D.
Apostolic Delegate to the United States
3339 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20008

Your Excellency:

This letter gives additional information regarding the case of M-004 and F-004 and their son M-002 of this Diocese. Your Excellency will recall that under date of April 23, 1966 (No. 1874/66) Your Excellency suggested that it might be helpful were I to receive the M-002's family to show them the interest of the Church. Next, under date of June 20, 1966 (No. 1874/36) you requested information about the present status of this case.

Upon receipt of this latter letter from Your Excellency, I invited M-004 and F-004 to visit me. They were reluctant to do so indicating that they had no reason for seeing me but would come if I wished to see them. An appointment was made with them and on July 8, 1966 Mr. M-004 came alone to the Chancery Office. He explained that his wife was so upset that she would not be able to face a discussion of the problem without fear of an emotional breakdown.

Mr. M-004 himself was obviously very distraught. He came into the office with his jacket under his arm and with his tie loosened and the shirt collar open. This together with the tense look about his face made it rather clear that he was very upset.

Our conversation lasted for close to two hours with Mr. M-004 doing most of the talking.

From our conversation, I learned that the young man M-002 had first been sent to the local state institution for mental problems but thereafter was transferred by his parents to the Institute of Living, a private institution in Hartford. However, after a short time he refused to stay there and according to his father, induced one of the workers to let him go free. The parents apparently were not able to get him to return and he lived with them at home for a short time. Then when one night he remained out of the house all night long, there were words between the father and himself and the young man packed and left the house and has not returned since. The father assures me that the boy has been living on the street

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and since he was not working, the father feared he may have been engaged in improper activity in order to obtain money whereby to live.

The father indicated that he had written to the police of the city asking that the boy be detained by them in order that he might have the help that he needed. I offered to contact the police with this same thought in mind and the father apparently had no objection to this procedure.

Shortly after and before I had the opportunity of consulting with the police authorities, I learned from the father that the boy was now wanted by the police in the City of Fairfield for breaking and entering. I arranged a meeting with the Superintendent of Police of the City of Bridgeport to discuss the matter with him and he agreed with the police officials of the nearby town of Fairfield not to press criminal charges against the young man when he was apprehended but rather to have him checked by a doctor so as to give him the psychiatric care that he evidently needs. However, the boy has not been apprehended and probably as the father had feared has left the area. However, I am confident that if he should be apprehended and an inquiry is made in either Fairfield or Bridgeport about his record that he will then be treated medically rather than criminally. This seems to be all that can be done at the present time.

Mr. M-004 himself is deeply pursuaded that the emotional breakdown of his son could have been avoided if the pastor of Precious Blood Parish in Trumbull, Reverend Raymond Stephenson, had acted as Mr. M-004 thinks he should have. According to Mr. M-004, the complaint was made by M-002 about the other priest in this matter to Fr. Stephenson. According to Mr. M-004, Fr. Stephenson directed the boy not to report to his parents. I have not questioned Fr. Stephenson in this matter but since he could have had no way of predicting an emotional collapse of this kind, I would judge that Fr. Stephenson was prepared to take the necessary action to eliminate the cause of the problem and felt that nothing could be gained by bringing it to the attention of the parents themselves.

I do not know what further can be done in this unfortunate case. It must be my prayer that Mr. M-004 himself will calm down somewhat. His anxiety about the boy has greatly upset him. If the boy should be arrested by police authorities, it would then be possible to assure for him some kind of medical assistance.

I should mention here in all fairness that Mr. M-004 himself is a good Catholic as is his wife and family. In fact, Mr. M-004 has a brother who is a priest and has several religious among his relatives. He indicated that it was for this reason that he did not take any civil action in the present instance.

This presents, therefore, this case to the present date. If there is additional information that Your Excellency desires, I shall be happy to obtain it for you. And any advice or instruction you would care to give, I shall be happy to receive. I do ask Your Excellency's prayers for this young man that God will bring him to the medical assistance that he does require.

With every best personal wish, I am

Most respectfully yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Walter W. Curtis, S.T.D.
Bishop of Bridgeport

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APOSTOLIC DELEGATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON 8, D. C.

No. 1874/66
THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

5 August 1966

Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, S. T. D.
Bishop of Bridgeport
250 Waldemere Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Your Excellency:

I am very thankful for the information you have provided under date of July 27th about developments in the case of M-002 [redacted]. From this I appreciate the paternal interest Your Excellency has taken in this unfortunate situation. I further realize that everything possible appears to have been done and future action will depend on the reappearance of the boy himself. In the meantime I, too, keep him and his parents in my prayers.

With cordial regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ [illegible]
Apostolic Delegate

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CONFIDENTIAL
SUBJECT TO COURT ORDER

APOSTOLIC DELEGATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20008

Ha 4482/66

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

21 December 1966

Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, DD
Bishop of Bridgeport
250 Waldemere Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Your Excellency:

The Sacred Congregation of the Council has written to me under date of December 5th (N. 108672/D) to make certain observations in the case of M-002 [redacted]. I convey these remarks to Your Excellency that you may consider them in your own approach to the problem.

The Holy See notes that neither the Ordinary nor the diocese of Bridgeport are obliged in strict justice to meet the expenses in the illness of the young man. This would be true even if it were proved that the priest in question was the cause of his condition. In such a case action for damages could be taken against the priest as an individual.

However, in a larger non-juridical sense the authorities in the Church have a responsibility for the actions of the priests subject to them. Most Catholics think, in a vague way, that the Bishop is accountable for the transgressions of his priests and that he should protect the faithful. They would not press a claim, though, to the extent that the Frechettes have.

The comment I have recognizes the difficulty of your own position. If you admit a claim of this kind, you cannot know

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where it will end. Moreover, if acceptance of responsibility in such a case becomes publicly known, you might be vulnerable in any number of other situations.

The suggestion is made that the diocese of Bridgeport may have some funds at its disposal for charitable purposes. Some allocation might be made from them to the M-002's family in such a way that the Church itself, and not the diocese of Bridgeport, will be thought of as offering assistance. This would safeguard the position of Your Excellency and at the same time meet the allegations that the Church is not interested in the welfare of her children when they are in trouble.

I realize, Your Excellency, that the solution is not an easy one but you will wish to consider it as the most promising that has yet appeared.

With cordial regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ A. Pagnozzi

Apostolic Delegate

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CONFIDENTIAL
SUBJECT TO COURT ORDER

APOSTOLIC DELEGATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20008

No 682/67

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

28 March 1967

Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, DD
Bishop of Bridgeport
250 Waldemere Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Your Excellency:

On 21 December 1966 I wrote to convey to Your Excellency the observations of the Sacred Congregation of the Council on the case of M-002 [redacted]. To the present there has not been an acknowledgment of my letter.

I realize that this is a painful and difficult subject for Your Excellency. Yet, for the good of souls it is a problem that must be faced. May I ask if any sort of a solution, even a tentative one, has been reached?

With cordial regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ G. Lagnozzi

Apostolic Delegate

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20008

No. 682/67

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

20 April 1967

Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, DD
Bishop of Bridgeport
250 Waldemere Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Your Excellency:

You will undoubtedly recall my letters of 21 December 1966 and 28 March 1967 about the case of M-002 [redacted]. In this context I must now write again as his parents continue to beseech some expression of interest in his regard. I enclose a photocopy of their latest letter of April 17th.

I am sure that Your Excellency will appreciate my interest in the current state of the problem.

With cordial regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ [illegible]

Apostolic Delegate