

ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 10, 1997

COPY

His Eminence, Gilberto Cardinal Agostoni
Prefect, The Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura
00120 Vatican City State
Europe

Your Eminence,

I am writing to request your assistance in a matter of justice for certain persons under my jurisdiction. A priest of this Archdiocese has been accused by three penitents of solicitation in the confessional so as to commit a sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue (c. 1387). Also, each penitent is a deaf person and the alleged offenses occurred while all of the penitents were minors. Furthermore, because these deaf persons tend to have very limited communication skills, these crimes did not come to my attention until long after canonical prescription would allow a penal action on my part. Finally, true scandal in the near future seems very possible because in November of 1996, I received a letter from an attorney suggesting the possibility of civil court action which no doubt would become well known in this community.

I approach you now requesting that a waiver of the canonical requirements concerning preperemptory time periods be issued. With such a waiver we would be able to proceed with appropriate canonical processes to effect justice in this case.

I wrote to His Eminence, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in July of 1996 when I became aware of the details of the situation. My hope was that, given the condition of the penitents, the length of time since the alleged crimes, and that the subject matter seems to be reserved to that Congregation (c. 1362, §1, 1°), perhaps His Eminence would grant special norms for a penal process in this case. So far, however, I have received no response.

Hence, I now seek your assistance. The issue concerns how the Church can provide justice when the administration of justice was impossible because all of the penitents were physically prohibited from reporting the crime at the time of the incidents, or soon thereafter, due to a lack of the vocabulary and skill necessary to acknowledge their psychological trauma.

The cause concerns the Reverend Lawrence C. Murphy, a priest whose only assignment was as a Chaplain, and eventually Director, of Saint John School for the Deaf in Milwaukee from 1950 to 1974. Moreover, according to the three persons who have given sworn testimony concerning Father Murphy's use of the confessional to solicit sinful actions against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, many other students were also victims of Father Murphy in this manner. Consequently, I believe there are in reality many additional victims needing justice and assistance.

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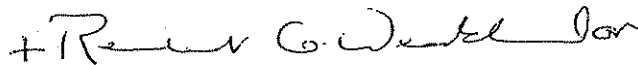
Although allegations against Father Murphy had been brought to the attention of my predecessor, allegations that resulted in a civil suit that was later dropped, I first became aware of the matter in 1995. So, shortly before I began my sabbatical on January 1, 1996, I directed the Reverend James E. Connell, my Vice Chancellor, to investigate the allegations. Then, upon my return on July 1, 1996 and after learning the results of this investigation, I instructed the Reverend Thomas T. Brundage, J.C.L., my Judicial Vicar, to research which canonical process would be appropriate. His effort convinced me to write to Cardinal Ratzinger in July of 1996.

My concern now is not only for the necessary justice, but I am also very interested in a healing response from the Church to the deaf community within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, so that their anger may be defused and their trust in ecclesiastical ministers be restored.

Finally, Your Eminence, while my comments in this letter have been very factual and legalistic in tone, please be assured that my primary concern is the spiritual well-being of all the persons involved in this case, including Father Murphy. Now I await your response.

Thank you for your assistance, and I have the honor to be, Your Eminence,

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B.
Archbishop of Milwaukee

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