

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

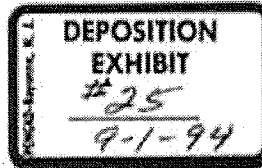
226 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-2197

The Chancery

CONFIDENTIAL

November 30, 1987

Mr. Gary R. Schoener
Executive Director
Walk-In Counseling Center
2421 Chicago Avenue So.
Minneapolis, MN 55404



Dear Gary,

I am writing to you regarding the need of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis for a re-evaluation of the Jemez Springs' report on Father Jerome Kern and a recommended program of rehabilitation for Father Kern.

Father Jerome Kern is 46 years old, has been a priest for 20 years and is currently co-pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Minnetonka, Minnesota.

I had occasion on May 4, 1987 to visit with Mrs. Jackie Heutmaker and Mrs. Mary Alice Turning and their two sons, Jamie Heutmaker, age 32, and Chuck Turning, age 31. Bishop Carlson was with me for this meeting.

Chuck and Jamie described the events of the summer of 1969 when Fr. Kern came to the Turning home and invited the two boys, then aged 13 and 14, to accompany him to swim at Lake Nokomis Beach. Two girls went along with the group.

The boys were wearing cut-off jeans at the time. When they got to the beach, a game of tag developed and they all got into the water. According to the two boys, Fr. Kern drove the game out into deeper water and at that point, he began to grasp each of the boys from behind and play as if he was saving them from drowning. The boys both described themselves as being good to excellent swimmers and had no need to be saved from drowning. Both boys are very clear and very exact in their memory that Fr. Kern invaded both of their cut-off jeans. Chuck Turning indicates that he remembers Fr. Kern invaded his shorts once and touched him on the genitals; Jamie Heutmaker remembers that Fr. Kern invaded his shorts a number of times, possibly 4-5 times, and touched his genitals on each of those occasions.

When all of the swimmers got out of the water and went to the shore, Fr. Kern initiated a wrestling match and again there was a great deal of touching through the clothes that happened, even though Jamie said he had advised he didn't feel well and didn't want to wrestle. Finally, Fr. Kern ceased in carrying out the game.

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Later that day one of the older Heutmaker daughters overheard the boys describing the events at Lake Nokomis and she told her mother, who in turn talked to Mrs. Turning. The mothers in turn brought it to the attention of the pastor.

There is a great deal of confusion about who then talked to whom and how eventually Fr. Kern found out that people were concerned about the events at Lake Nokomis. In any case, Fr. Kern did come over to the Heutmakers' home and met with the Heutmaker parents and the Turning parents. He was reported by Mrs. Heutmaker and Mrs. Turning to have been "quite brazen and insensitive" when they shared with him their considerable distress at what they had heard about the events at Lake Nokomis. Apparently, Fr. Kern indicated that all he was doing was engaging in "Italian wrestling," which he learned in Italy when he was a student there and which was all about men wrestling with one another and grasping one another's genitals. Needless to say, the Turnings and the Heutmakers were not impressed with this explanation.

In January, 1970, Fr. Kern was assigned to Our Lady of Grace Parish in Edina, and at that time, Fr. Joseph Baglio, the pastor, asked him why he was assigned there. Fr. Kern, according to Fr. Baglio, reported that this incident had happened and that again, as far as he (Fr. Kern) was concerned, it was "Italian wrestling" and he thought that the reason for his move was an over-reaction to what had happened. Fr. Baglio told me on the phone in October, 1987, that after Fr. Kern told him why he was moved from St. Mark's Fr. Baglio said that there was to be no activity like that at Our Lady of Grace as long as Fr. Kern would be there and Fr. Kern agreed to that. Fr. Baglio also informed me that during the period from 1970-1976 when he and Fr. Kern were together at St. Mark's, he observed nothing in Fr. Kern's behavior that could be questionable regarding the matters that we are concerned with.

Bishop Carlson and I met with Fr. Kern on June 5, 1987, and indicated to him that Mrs. Turning and Mrs. Heutmaker had called the Chancery, concerned as to what the Church had done following the incidents of 1969 with Fr. Kern. Mrs. Turning and Mrs. Heutmaker indicated that they had been given no explanations of what the Church had done and because of the publicity around Fr. Adamson in the winter of 1987, they needed to know whether the Church had followed through and if so, how this was done.

We then reported to Fr. Kern the events that Mrs. Heutmaker and Mrs. Turning and their sons had described and Fr. Kern admitted that the events happened as described except he indicated that he did not thoroughly invade the boys' cut-offs but that he had just gotten his hands inside the top of each set of shorts. Bishop Carlson and I told Fr. Kern that judging from our lengthy interviews with the two mothers and the two adult sons, we believed their report of what happened.

Bishop Carlson also related to Fr. Kern an occasion that happened a few years ago whereby he (Bishop Carlson) and another priest were driving by the southeast corner of Loring Park at around 8:30 p.m. on a weekday evening and saw Fr. Kern entering the park. Fr. Kern did not deny that,

in fact, he probably was entering the park. However, he did not agree with the opinion that the wide-open almost sexual trafficking that goes on at that particular part of Loring Park in the evening had anything to do with why he was there. In other words, he indirectly denied that he was homosexual and continues to deny that.

At a subsequent meeting, I shared with Fr. Kern that while I worked on the St. Paul Seminary Campus during the mid and late-1970's, I know that I observed him, at least on one occasion, entering the McCarthy Gym with a young boy, that to the best of my recollection, appeared to have been around 7-8 years old. However, I also told Fr. Kern that it was very difficult for me to be more specific about when I saw that or anything else more specific about my recall of it.

Fr. Kern went down to the Servants of the Paraclete at Jemez Springs, New Mexico this past June, 1987, for an evaluation. A copy of his week-long stay at Jemez Springs and their evaluation accompanies this letter along with the signed original release which Fr. Kern has authorized for the Servants of the Paraclete at Jemez Springs to release to you any and all pertinent testing and data regarding Fr. Kern.

Subsequent to Fr. Kern's return from Jemez Springs, I met with him again and we discussed the evaluation from Jemez Springs. Fr. Kern appears to be most willing to cooperate with any program of rehabilitation that will be recommended for him here in the local area.

I then, as you know, had an opportunity to visit with you, at which time you asked me to check even further into Fr. Kern's activities between 1969 and the present. Above I have referred to my conversation with Fr. Joseph Baglio, whom Fr. Kern allowed me to talk to and who was also with him from 1969 until 1976 at Our Lady of Grace.

Fr. Kern also authorized me to speak with Fr. Rinaldo Custodio, with whom he has been co-pastor from 1976 to 1987 at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Minnetonka.

I met with Fr. Custodio in October, 1987. Upon questioning Fr. Custodio about Fr. Kern's behavior around adolescent and pre-adolescent children, Fr. Custodio could only remember that when Fr. Kern and other members of the parish staff are seated in the school lunchroom, Fr. Kern does have a habit of "drawing and/or pulling male children into his lap and tickling them on the stomach". Fr. Custodio indicated that Fr. Kern does this only to boys, as best as he can remember, between approximately the ages of 6-11. Fr. Custodio has never thought that this was unusual behavior because Fr. Kern does it in the presence of a lot of other adult people and to the best of his knowledge, he has never seen a child that objected to it. However, Fr. Custodio would admit that he himself is a rather private person and does not readily accept anyone else reaching out and physically pulling him into any kind of physically close proximity and he could see how maybe some of these children may have felt that way when Fr. Kern did this. Because of their relationship as a child to Fr. Kern as an adult and as a priest, they may not have been able to express their discomfort with this kind of behavior. Fr. Custodio also indicated that he has observed that Fr. Kern does spontaneously embrace and touch adult men

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and women and there has never seemed to be anything inappropriate about this kind of behavior. He seems to initiate it as much as he is responsive to it. It appears very natural and normal as far as Fr. Custodio can say.

Fr. Custodio also indicates that Fr. Kern takes a day off a week and is faithful to that. He seems to get a normal amount of recreation along with his hard work and he does describe him as a hard-working priest. Fr. Custodio and Fr. Kern both joined the "International Fitness Center" on Hwy. 101 and Hwy. 7 and they both regularly use the whirlpool, sauna and go swimming.

Fr. Kern also indicated that I could speak to his long-time friend, Fr. William Whittier, more in the aspect of Fr. Whittier being an advocate for him. I did have a lengthy conversation with Fr. Whittier on the phone and he appreciates the fact that we are willing to stay in touch with him.

Gary, you can see by all of the above information that there is a need for a person of your expertise to re-assess and evaluate the material from New Mexico and give us a specific recommendation for ongoing rehabilitation for Fr. Kern. Mrs. Heutmacker and Mrs. Turning deserve to know what kind of follow-up we are finally doing in the case of Fr. Kern and certainly Fr. Kern deserves to have us be straight and clear with him as to our expectations for him if he is to continue in ministry.

It is also my understanding and Fr. Kern's understanding that you will be contacting him by mid-December to set up an appointment with him.

I will be more than willing to cooperate with you in any way that I can. I deeply appreciate your willingness to assist us.

Sincerely,

Reverend Michael J. O'Connell
Vicar General
Moderator of the Curia

MJO:mrw
Enclosures

*See: Archbishop Rouch
Bishop Cullen*