

November 5, 1991

His Eminence Anthony J. Bevilacqua
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Re: Father Nicholas Cudemo

Dear Cardinal Bevilacqua:

The events of the past five weeks compel us to notify the Archdiocese of our deep disagreement with the Archdiocese's decisions regarding Father Cudemo and the rationale underpinning those decisions. This letter summarizes what we know of the problem and our great concern for what we perceive is a more serious issue. It also states our commitment to take further action if necessary.

We believe that Father Cudemo has sexually and psychologically abused girls and young women for the past twenty years. This criminal and immoral conduct constitutes a pattern of abuse which makes Father Cudemo a present real danger to other girls and women. The Archdiocese has a moral and legal duty to remove this threat. The Archdiocese's failure to remove Father Cudemo from his position as Pastor can only be viewed as immoral and negligent.

We further believe that these decisions reveal a more fundamental failing on the part of the men given the duty to confront these problems and of the process upon which they rely. It has become apparent to us that there is a basic inability and/or unwillingness to understand the complex area of child sex abuse and sexual misconduct engaged in by certain clergy. The Archdiocese's intentional failure to aggressively confront these problems in an honest and professional manner guarantees that more devastating harm will befall other children - boys and girls - and vulnerable women at the hands of clergy for whom the Archdiocese is responsible.

These beliefs are based on the following information which we have been able to piece together, starting with the facts given to the Archdiocese by us in September, 1991.

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Letter to Cardinal Bevilacqua from victims of Fr. Cudemo. The victims and their families complain that the Cardinal had not removed Fr. Cudemo as pastor at St. Callistus despite numerous reports of his sexual abuse of girls. GJ-958

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On September 25, 1991, we met with Rev. Msgr. James Molloy and Rev. William Lynn at 222. First, described the initial sexual abuse which occurred when was ten years old. Father Cudemo had become very close to parents and was considered a member of the family. He frequently stayed overnight at their home. By the time he was transferred to Cardinal Dougherty High School, the sexual abuse was complete and continuous.

described the sexual abuse in detail, as well as the tremendous emotional and psychological harm it has caused her. She said that every day she struggles with the conflict and hurt inside her and that it has been really a nightmare beyond accurate description.

stated that she has experienced deep psychological torment since adolescence, through young adulthood, and to the present. She has attempted suicide several times and has been hospitalized, including in intensive care. She said that she has been in counselling since October, 1990, and that the weekly therapy sessions with the psychologist and psychiatrist exact great emotional and financial strain on the family.

husband spoke of the terrible effect it has had on their marriage. Again, it has been and is a day-to-day struggle just to keep everyone together.

stated that she is a cousin of and also a cousin of Father Cudemo. She described one brief incident of sexual misconduct by Father Cudemo in her bedroom when she was fourteen years old.

described two separate incidents of sexual misconduct by Father Cudemo of a more serious nature when she was fifteen years old. Unable until now to talk about it even with her sisters, she spoke of this abuse and of the emotional turmoil it had caused her.

Msgr. Molloy said that he believed us. There then followed a lengthy discussion about what should happen as a result of these complaints. It was agreed that Msgr. Molloy would:

- * Meet with Father Cudemo as soon as possible and present these complaints to him.
- * Require him to undergo an evaluation.
- * Advise him that if he asked for the names of the women making these complaints, he was forbidden from making any contact; if he did, he would be immediately suspended.
- * Arrange for an evaluation which would probably take place in three to four weeks.
- * Advise us of the results of the evaluation.

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Be available to answer any of our questions or hear from us if we did not like what was being done.

We did not spend much time discussing what would happen to Father Cudemo between the time he was notified of these complaints and his evaluation. It seemed that it depended on his response. We did make it clear that we were concerned about the three to four week waiting period, but reluctantly accepted it because of the critical importance Msgr. Molloy placed on the evaluation. There was no discussion about what steps would be taken irrespective of the results of the evaluation.

Speaking about these terrible experiences was itself a heavy burden and Msgr. Molloy and Father Lynn had helped us through it. We left the meeting somewhat relieved and encouraged.

On October 2, 1991, Msgr. Molloy and Father Lynn met with Father Cudemo concerning these complaints. After the meeting, Msgr. Molloy called and told her that he thought that it had gone well. Msgr. Molloy stated that Father Cudemo's response to the complaint was that he did not remember anything like that happening to him. Msgr. Molloy told her that the more Father Cudemo talked, the more it became apparent that he was sick and needed help. According to Msgr. Molloy, Father Cudemo agreed to the evaluation and did not demand to know the names of the women.

The next day, October 3, 1991, Father Lynn called and told her that Father Cudemo demanded a meeting with Rev. Msgr. Edward Cullen. With Msgr. Molloy and Father Lynn present, Father Cudemo met with Msgr. Cullen that day and told them that he wanted to know the names of the women. He also asked them to give us the message that he does not remember doing anything to the extent that it would have hurt anyone so badly.

Father Lynn told that Father Cudemo was given our names and that the evaluation was scheduled for December 1, 1991.

On October 4, 1991, called Father Lynn and told him that we were shocked and very upset that Father Cudemo met with Msgr. Cullen (believed to be a classmate and friend of Father Cudemo's) and that the evaluation could not be done until December 1, 1991. also asked whether Father Cudemo was to be removed as Pastor pending the evaluation. Father Lynn told her that December 1st was the earliest possible date and that ~~Father Cudemo would not be removed because he had complied with the two requirements of not contacting us and agreeing to the evaluation.~~

Because of our great dismay with these developments, a second meeting was held with Msgr. Molloy and Father Lynn on October 17, 1991. We talked at great length about why Father Cudemo should be removed from the ministry before the evaluation. Msgr. Molloy told us that the evaluation would have to take place first and that Father Cudemo was complying with the conditions set out at his first meeting. Msgr. Molloy also said that Father Cudemo was not being removed because the misconduct had occurred fifteen to twenty years ago. He

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asked how do we know that "he has not grown up and is not doing it anymore?" He said that if it was current, it would be different. Msgr. Molloy said that "We" have to protect Father Cudemo's rights too.

Msgr. Molloy tried further to justify this position by explaining that every time a complaint is made against a priest, the Archdiocese cannot be expected to remove him from his position. He illustrated this problem by describing a situation in which a mother called complaining that a priest was giving her son pornographic materials. The mother, on being questioned further, stated that the problem was "sometimes when he reads this material he turns into a fox, but not always; sometimes he turns into a deer." We were left speechless and later felt belittled that a professional designated to deal with such a sensitive area could so facilely equate our "problem" with that of the above described situation. We left this meeting somewhat discouraged.

Upon further reflection, we decided to contact other women whom we believed may have been abused by Father Cudemo. We had suspected for some time that a woman named _____ had had a relationship with Father Cudemo and so we contacted her. _____ is a thirty-one year old single woman and elementary school teacher in the Philadelphia area. She told us the following.

In May, 1991, _____ called Rev. Msgr. John Jagodzinski and asked to speak with him about Father Cudemo. At the meeting with Msgr. Jagodzinski, she related that:

- She had been in love with Father Cudemo.
- She and Father Cudemo had had a continuous sexual relationship for the past fifteen years.
- She and Father Cudemo jointly owned a house in Orlando, Florida and frequently stayed there together.
- Father Cudemo told her that "you don't do what you want to do, but what you are called to do" and he told her what she was called to do.
- Father Cudemo told her that she was not "cut out" for marriage.
- Father Cudemo tried to dissuade her from doing what she wanted to do.
- Father Cudemo tried to alienate her from her family.
- She had suffered severe psychological harm as a result of the relationship.
- She had been suicidal on several occasions as a result of this harm.

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- She was receiving counselling for this harm.
- She ended the relationship because she came to realize that it was slowly destroying her.
- She knew of other women who had sought counselling as a result of their relationship with Father Cudemo.
- She told Father Cudemo that he needed help.

This was a two hour meeting during which Msgr. Jagodzinski took no notes and asked very few questions. He did ask what she wanted done and she told him that Father Cudemo "needs help." Msgr. Jagodzinski told her that Father Cudemo would be called in to discuss this matter but that she should be prepared for the possibility that nothing might be done to Father Cudemo.

According to , Father Cudemo met with Msgr. Cullen concerning her complaint. She does not know whether Father Cudemo admitted or denied having a relationship with . No one called her back to report on what follow up had been taken by the Archdiocese. does know that the Archdiocese told Father Cudemo to terminate his ownership in the house in Florida.

We have given a great deal of thought to the many aspects of this problem. Not only have we focused on the harm we and quite possibly other women have suffered, but also on the sickness suffered by Father Cudemo, the threat he poses, the acts and omissions of the Archdiocese and the fundamentally defective rationale and process relied on by the Archdiocese to justify the approach taken to this problem. We have consulted several priests and nuns, a priest canon lawyer, a nun canon law expert, a psychologist and psychiatrist, two civil lawyers and two Assistant District Attorneys who specialize in child abuse. We continue to seek professional advice and additional information from other women about Father Cudemo.

Our immediate concern is with the Archdiocese's decision to allow Father Cudemo to remain as Pastor pending the evaluation. Msgr. Molloy places great importance on the evaluation and uses it to justify keeping Father Cudemo in his present position.

We believe that this approach is nothing less than an excuse to avoid making difficult decisions now. The evaluation is not a test of the ~~truthfulness of our complaints. Either the Archdiocese believes our complaints~~ or believes they are fabrications. The evaluation is not an end in itself but a means to determine the depth of the problem. It should recommend a course of treatment and shed some light on the prognosis for recovery.

Our complaints are reason enough to suspend Father Cudemo. Reliance on the age of our complaints to avoid taking immediate action conveniently ignores the information provided by . To ask us how we know whether Father

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Cudemo has not grown up and is not doing it anymore reflects a mindset which is demeaning to us and pathetically self-deceptive. It shows a regrettable lack of sensitivity and a basic ignorance of the area of child abuse and sexual misconduct.

It is beyond comprehension how the Archdiocese cannot see the present danger. The absence of a vehement denial clearly supports the truthfulness of the complaints. Father Cudemo's response that he does not remember sexually abusing several teenage girls, one continuously for approximately four years, is so bizarre as to evidence a morally bankrupt and psychologically dysfunctional person.

The professionals we have consulted tell us that individuals who engage in this kind of criminal aberrant behavior are rarely cured and therefore constitute a potential threat to others. The Archdiocese has the duty not only to protect potential victims, but also to aid those clergy afflicted with this problem.

The account given by _____ also should have been enough to suspend Father Cudemo. The approach taken by Msgr. Jagodzinski and the omissions of the Archdiocese thereafter are not only evidence of negligence but also of the anachronistic thinking which has perpetuated the "cover-up" approach historically taken by the Archdiocese.

The priests we have consulted uniformly tell us that any substantial change will come only in response to a lawsuit. Do we have to name Your Eminence, Cardinal Kroll, Father Cudemo and the Archdiocese in a lawsuit to move you to confront honestly these problems?

We remain open to further discussion. We pray daily that God will give strength to us and greater wisdom to you. We know that you are a great listener. We do not know if you understand.

Sincerely yours,

cc: Msgr. James Molloy