

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Office of Professional Responsibility
Office of Assistance Ministry



Post Office Box 1979
Chicago, Illinois 60690

(312) 751 - 8256/8267
(312) 751 - 8307 (Fax)

June 7, 1995

Mr. Eric M. Johnson
J.D.C.
35 West 64th Street
New York, New York 100

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am Ralph Bonaccorsi. I am the director of the Office of Assistance Ministry for the Archdiocese of Chicago. Cardinal Bernardin established this office so that the Church might - when called upon -- reach out to people who are in pain or who have been hurt by others in our Church.

Cardinal Bernardin has asked me to contact you regarding your letter of May 1, 1995. He has asked me, also, to convey his concern and sadness over the abuse you described and the pain and hurt it has caused you. He also deeply appreciates your concern for the safety of other children.

Mr. [redacted], a Fr. Bruce Wellems, C.M.F. is residing in the Chicago Archdiocese at the present time. Because Fr. Wellems is a member of the Claretian Order, the Cardinal requested that I speak directly with Fr. Wellems' superiors, the Provincial of the Claretian Fathers, Fr. Ted Cirone. Fr. Cirone has assured me that your letter has been read thoroughly reviewed according to the established policies and procedures of the Claretian Order. I expect that Fr. Cirone will be contacting you in the near future.

In the meantime, you may wish to call me so that I may clarify or assist you as this matter goes forward. You may call my office collect. Mayra Flores, an associate, and myself welcome your call.

All of God's Good Graces,

Ralph

Ralph Bonaccorsi

Eric M. Johnson
35 West 64th St. #PH-C
New York, N.Y. 10023

June 11, 1995

Archdiocese of Chicago
Pastoral Center
PO Box 1979
Chicago, Illinois 60690

Attn: Joseph Cardinal Bernardin

To whom it may concern:

I previously sent the attached letter dated May 1, 1995, and have yet to receive any response. I believe this matter deserves immediate attention and I expect immediate response. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Eric M. Johnson

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June 21, 1995

Mr. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
35 West 4th Street
New York, New York 10012

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

I am confident that you have received communication from Fr. Ted Cirone, Provincial of the Claretian Fathers.

Mr. [REDACTED], if it is agreeable to you that I do the further inquiry, as suggested by Fr. Cirone, than may I ask you to contact me by phone or letter regarding an opportunity for us to talk with one another.

If you choose to call please do so collect. We are in the office generally each day from 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Chicago time. Our number is 312/751-8267.

If you write please indicate a time when it would be convenient for me to contact you.

All of God's Good Graces.

Ralph

Ralph Bonaccorsi

[REDACTED]
*I hope that we will have an opportunity to speak
with one another soon.*

Ralph

CLARETIANS

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL

400 North Euclid Avenue - Oak Park, Illinois 60302

June 16, 1995

Mr. Eric M. Johnson
35 W. 64th St. #PH-C
New York, N.Y. 10023

Dear Mr. Johnson

Mr. Ralph Bonaccorsi, on behalf of the Archdiocese of Chicago, has brought to my attention the letter you wrote to Cardinal Bernardin concerning Father Bruce Wellems, and Mr. Bonaccorsi's response to you. I fully concur with the sentiments expressed in Mr. Bonaccorsi's letter. In a special way, I wish to express my sorrow for the pain evident in your letter, and appreciation for your concern about others.

As Mr. Bonaccorsi informed you, Fr. Bruce Wellems is a member of the Claretian Missionaries. Until your letter reached me, as far as I am aware nobody has ever brought to our attention any indication of inappropriate behavior on the part of Father Wellems.

Let me assure you that we take seriously the information you have given us. Both the Archdiocese and the Claretians have in place policies and procedures which will be carefully followed. To better insure objectivity, I have asked and the Archdiocese has accepted that the initial phase of investigation be conducted by authorized personnel of the Archdiocese. You will be directly contacted about this. The results are then given to a Ministry Fitness Board, of which only one member will be a Claretian, who will give their recommendations to me and eventually to Cardinal Bernardin. Our objective is an honest and objective appraisal, justice to all concerned, and avoidance of any serious potential harm to all those for whom we have a pastoral responsibility.

I promise to keep you and this whole matter in my prayers.

Sincerely,
Ted Cirone, C.M.F.
Provincial Superior

CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCE • 400 NORTH EUCLID AVENUE • OAK PARK, ILLINOIS 60302 • TELEPHONE (708) 848-2076



January 18, 1996

Mr. Eric M. Johnson
35 W. 64th Street #PH-C
New York, NY 10023

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Finally, I am able to give you more information about what is being done in response to the concerns you raised about Father Bruce Wellems.

Mr. Ralph Bonaccorsi gave me a copy of your November 19 letter to him, as designated representative of the Archdiocese of Chicago for these matters. He and I agreed that we would follow our respective policies and procedures applicable to this case, and would do our best to obtain an objective and just solution. We agreed that our principal objective is to discover whether Fr. Wellems is potentially or actually a moral danger to anyone, especially children.

So far there have been various personal interviews of Fr. Wellems, as well as of some of the persons most closely associated with his ministry. Fr. Wellems has agreed to undergo extensive in-depth interviews and a whole range of psychological testing by a team of professional personnel belonging to what is considered one of the best institutes in the country for this type of investigation. The interviews and testing were not able to begin until just recently. They must be spaced over a period of time; and still more time will be needed for their analysis and final recommendations by the professional staff.

As I mentioned in my previous letter, nobody has ever brought to our attention any indication of inappropriate behavior on the part of Fr. Wellems. For some years now, we Claretians have a strict policy that any priest or pastoral agent dealing with children must do so in

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the constant presence of parents or other responsible adults. Fr. Wellems has assured us, and those who work with him have confirmed, that he has followed this norm carefully.

We will await the results of the professional consultation and of our special advisory board, and eventually transmit the results to Cardinal Bernardin.

I realize how uncomfortable this whole situation must be for you, and I appreciate how you would not want to get involved if it were not for real concern that no harm be done to anyone, especially the most defenseless. Once again, I promise to keep you and this whole matter in my prayers.

Sincerely,



Fr. Ted Cirone, C.M.F.
Provincial Superior

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August 28, 1995

Mr. Eric M. Johnson
#PH-C
35 West 64th Street
New York, New York 10023

Dear Mr. Johnson:

As an initial step in gathering information regarding your allegation I have enclosed a list of questions that I ask be answered to the best of your ability.

Once I receive your information I will be back in touch with you to discuss next steps. Hope to hear from you soon.

All of God's Good Graces,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ralph".

Ralph Bonaccorsi

Enclosure:

Attn: Father Ralph Bonaccorsi
c/o Archdiocese of Chicago
Post Office Box 1979
Chicago, Illinois 60690

Eric M. Johnson
35 West 64th Street # PH-C
New York, New York 10023

September 08, 1995

Father Bonaccorsi:

I just wanted to let you know that I received your questions and will return them with my
~~responses as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance.~~

Sincerely,

Eric M. Johnson

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July 11, 1996

Mr. Dr. M. [redacted]

New York, New York

Dear [redacted]:

Greetings, I hope that all is well with you. I would like to give you a report on the conclusions that have been reached in reference to the concerns you expressed about Fr. Bruce Wellems, C.M.F., in a letter to Cardinal Bernardin dated May 1, 1995, and in more detail in your November 19 letter to me.

As you know from our previous conversations and dialogue, upon receipt of your allegation and after an initial investigation by the Archdiocese, the Claretian Missionaries according to Archdiocesan policy - were given the responsibility of conducting the full investigation and of presenting their conclusions and final recommendations to Cardinal Bernardin.

Since the Cardinal was aware that I had been in dialogue with you over the months, he requested that I summarize and convey to you the outcome of the investigation and final recommendations. I do so as follows:

Fr. Wellems agreed to cooperate fully with the extensive process, which included investigations, interviews, and a wide range of psychological testing by a team of professionals in one of the best forensic institutes for this type of investigation.

The main focus of the investigation had been to determine whether what Bruce Wellems may have done in his youth was a phase of adolescent experimentation which he later outgrew through religious formation and other means, or whether it was an early indication of a lifestyle that persists and that his priestly ministry should be terminated or restricted. Further:

- ▶ None of the individuals or groups involved in the investigation of Fr. Wellems judged that Fr. Wellems should be removed from his priestly ministry.

- ▶ All other inquires of Fr. Wellem's former superiors, co-workers and friends confirmed that there never had been accusations of suspicions about Fr. Wellem's behavior during his years of priestly ministry.
- ▶ It was also determined that no other record or hint that any accusation had ever been made by children, parents, or others.
- ▶ During the entire investigation no data has emerged that might in any way suggest that Fr. Wellem's has acted out in an inappropriately sexual manner with minors since he reached his own maturity.
- ▶ The psychologist in the Chicago area who has been seeing Fr. Wellem's regularly during the last year or so, and who has independently reviewed the results of the psychological testing and interviews, in his own independent evaluation wrote: *"I have viewed Fr. Wellem's - and continue to do so - as a fundamentally healthy adult who is highly motivated in his ministry and who is sincere in pursuing further psychological and spiritual growth. Fr. Wellem's has an exceptionally strong sense of values and commitment to ministry. I do not estimate there is any danger whatsoever in his working with children in a normal and appropriate church setting."*
- ▶ However, all agreed that he must continue to follow the Claretian precautionary norms, especially about not dealing with children or adolescents except in the presence of other adults. Fr. Wellem's has agreed to all of this, and will be monitored by his pastor and Provincial Superior.
- ▶ Throughout the demanding process, Fr. Wellem's regularly expressed sorrow for any harm he may have done in his youth. He also expressed thanks to God and to counselors and spiritual directors for the opportunities he received to change and to grow spiritually and in other human ways through his education in a Catholic University and seminary, and through regular spiritual direction.

Therefore, having reviewed the case thoroughly, Cardinal Bernardin has accepted the recommendation of Fr. Cirone, which reads as follows: *"With the unanimous consent of my Claretian Provincial Council, I hereby recommend that Fr. Wellem's be allowed to retain the faculties he presently holds in the Archdiocese, and that no special restrictions be placed on his ministry."*

Cardinal Bernardin asked me to convey his appreciation for the concern you have shown for the well being of others, especially children, in bringing this matter to his attention. His hope is that your conscience will be in peace with the realization that your concerns were taken seriously, that a thorough investigation has been conducted, and that the results give us a solid level of assurance.

All of God's Good Graces,

Sincerely,

Ralph

Ralph Bonaccorsi