NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Priest at Wis. trial calls news reports inaccurate

Catholic News Service | Mar. 30, 2010

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- A priest who was involved in the canonical trial of a priest accused of abusing deaf children decades ago says news reports about Pope Benedict XVI's involvement in the case are based on "sloppy and inaccurate reporting."

"I have no reason to believe that (then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) was involved at all" in the case of Father Lawrence Murphy, who served at St. John's School for the Deaf in Milwaukee from 1950 to 1974, said Father Thomas Brundage, who was presiding judge in the 1996-98 trial against Father Murphy on charges of child sexual abuse and solicitation within the confessional.

"Placing this matter at (the pope's) doorstep is a huge leap of logic and information," he added.

Father Brundage was judicial vicar for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee from 1995-2003. Now moderator of the curia and judicial vicar in the Archdiocese of Anchorage, he gave background on the Murphy case in a lengthy article posted March 29 on the Web site of the Catholic Anchor, archdiocesan newspaper.

Although it has been widely reported that the canonical trial that could have led to Father Murphy's laicization was halted after the priest, who was elderly and in poor health, appealed to the Vatican, Father Brundage said the trial ended only when the priest died. [CORRECTION: Priest-judge was asked to halt trial of priest abuser [1]]

"On the day that Father Murphy died, he was still the defendant in a church criminal trial," he added. "No one seems to be aware of this. Had I been asked to abate this trial, I most certainly would have insisted that an appeal be made to the supreme court of the church, or Pope John Paul II if necessary. That process would have taken months if not longer."

Father Brundage criticized The New York Times, The Associated Press and other media outlets for falsely attributing to him some handwritten comments on correspondence between the Vatican and the Milwaukee Archdiocese.

"I was never contacted by any of these news agencies but they felt free to quote me," he wrote. "The documents were not written by me and do not resemble my handwriting. ... I have no idea who wrote these statements."

The priest said he was told as a freshman journalism student at Marquette University "to check, recheck and triple-check our quotes if necessary."

"Discerning truth takes time and it is apparent that The New York Times, The Associated Press and others did not take the time to get the facts correct," he said.

Father Brundage praised Pope Benedict as the "most reactive and proactive of any international church official in history with regard to the scourge of clergy sexual abuse of minors."

This pope "has done more than any other pope or bishop in history to rid the Catholic Church of the scourge of child sexual abuse and provide for those who have been injured," he said. "The Catholic Church is probably the safest place for children at this point in history."

It was during the then-cardinal's tenure as prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that the competency to hear cases of sexual abuse of minors was transferred from the Roman Rota, where cases "could languish for years," to the doctrinal congregation, Father Brundage noted.

After the transfer, "in my observation as well as many of my canonical colleagues, sexual abuse cases were handled expeditiously, fairly and with due regard to the rights of all the parties involved," he added. "I have no doubt that this was the work of then-Cardinal Ratzinger."

In addition, the pope has "repeatedly apologized for the shame of the sexual abuse of children," met with victims and directed various bishops' conferences to improve their response to the problem, he said.

Father Brundage said that with the help of an interpreter, he conducted "gut-wrenching interviews" with about a dozen victims of Father Murphy, including one who had become a perpetrator himself.

"These were the darkest days of my own priesthood, having been ordained less than 10 years," he said. "Grace-filled spiritual direction has been a godsend."

The priest said that in his work as a volunteer prison chaplain he has found similarities between those incarcerated for child sexual abuse and the priest-perpetrators he had met.

"They tend to be very smart and manipulative," he said. "Most are highly narcissistic and do not see the harm that they have caused. They view the children they have abused not as people but as objects. They rarely show remorse and, moreover, sometimes portray themselves as the victims. They are, in short, dangerous people and should never be trusted again. Most will recommit their crimes if given a chance."

Source URL (retrieved on *01/22/2017 - 12:36*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/priest-wis-trial-calls-news-reports-inaccurate

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/17737