

356 H Avenue
Coronado, CA 92118
May 18, 2023

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak
Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown
2713 W Chestnut Ave
Altoona, PA 16601

Dear Bishop Bartchak,

I am writing to request that the Diocese pays the counseling costs not covered by the health insurance of a man who was sexually abused when he was an altar boy at Our Lady of Victory Church in State College. The abuse was committed by Charles Martino, a parish youth minister who was accepted to study for the priesthood by the diocese with a recommendation from the pastor, Monsignor Patrick Fleming.

If you look into the diocesan records, you will see that when “Chuck” Martino was living at St. Francis Seminary while enrolled in his junior year at St. Francis College, he was reported for inappropriate behavior with boys at St. Michael’s parish in Loretto. When I was contacted by the pastor of St. Michael’s who inquired if there were any complaints from parents or children about Martino when he worked with the youth of our parish, I told him neither I nor the pastor received any complaints. I did point out that when Martino helped me with the altar boys on an outing or an overnight camping trip, I was always present and never left him or anyone alone with the boys. Consequently, I said Martino never would have had an opportunity to do anything inappropriate.

In this particular abuse case, however, Martino invited the altar boy to his home for an overnight without my knowledge. He said that his parents knew that he worked with me and they assumed that their son was as safe with Martino as he was with me. Consequently, they didn’t hesitate to let their son go on an overnight with Martino. Like many abused minors, the altar boy never reported the abuse to his parents or to me. He was afraid that if he told his father what Martino did to him, his father might have killed Martino.

After working with me for a few months, Martino said that he wanted to study for the priesthood and asked if I would write him a recommendation. I told him that I felt he should continue his studies at Penn State; date; and then decide in his senior year if he still felt called to the priesthood. I told him that celibacy required a great sacrifice and that dating girls in college could help him discern if he could lead a celibate life. Little did I realize, however, that he was a homosexual and had no desire to marry and have children. It was only after he was expelled from St. Francis that I ran into a Catholic State College police officer who told me that he recently arrested Martino for an altercation with a patron at a bar that catered to homosexuals.

Looking back upon my four and a half years at Our Lady of Victory, three years with Bob Kelly and a year and a half with Marty Cingle, I guess I was naïve to believe that they, along with Chuck Martino, were heterosexually oriented as I was. Little did I realize that they

were preying on “my” altar boys whom I loved as a father. God knows what I might have done to Kelly, Cingle, or Martino had one of the boys reported their abuse to me.

While I know you will need to know the name of the victim, I want to assure him that his report will be handled in a confidential manner. He continues to be a devout Catholic and I assured him that his abuse would not be mishandled as you and I know has happened in too many cases where Church officials have neglected to care for victims. Like many victims he tried to deal with what happened to him without professional help, hoping that time would heal his wounds. While he is fortunate to have married and to have a supportive and loving wife, both he and his wife can use help in dealing with psychological and behavioral problems that often affect abuse victims even decades after the abuse occurred.

Please let me know how you wish to proceed. I told him I would only provide you his name and contact information after I was assured in writing that what happened to him in Our Lady of Victory parish would be kept confidential.

Fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gomulka", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gene Thomas Gomulka
genegomulka@gmail.com
O (619) 437-7116 C (619) 203-8911