

November 1, 2019

Archbishop Christophe Pierre
Apostolic Nunciature
3339 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20008-3610

Your Excellency,

Our names are Karl Franz Discher, 2nd Theologian and Seminarian for the Archdiocese of Baltimore and Norman and Jennifer Discher, Catholics residing in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. We are writing to you today to ask for your assistance, as our nation's representative for our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in resolving two matters of an extremely grave nature. The first matter concerns the safety and well-being of Karl Franz Discher, a Seminarian of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and the second matter is an outgrowth of the first, and involves Norman and Jennifer Discher and includes what gives every appearance of being a breach in the Seal of Confession by two Baltimore priests, Vocation Director Steven P. Roth and Msgr. James Barker, pastor of St. Ignatius Church, Hickory, Maryland.

Regarding the first matter:

For the past year, Karl, age 24, has been experiencing unabated sexually and generally harassing behavior, including behavior that could be considered as "pursuing" or "stalking", from transitional Baltimore Deacon Christopher Pinto, a man in his mid-to-late 40's and newly transferred into the Baltimore Archdiocese from the Diocese of Trenton, NJ.

While Karl made formal verbal as well as written complaints regarding the sexual harassment to Fr. Steven P. Roth, Vocation Director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as early as the beginning of this year, Director Roth has consistently refused to effectively act on Karl's behalf and address Deacon Pinto's harassing behavior or place any boundaries around Deacon Pinto's conduct. Due to Fr. Roth's refusal to act, Karl needed to obtain an attorney to issue a "cease and desist" letter to Deacon Pinto in order to stop Deacon Pinto from continuing to pursue Karl. In what appears to be an effort to protect Deacon Pinto, Fr. Roth also appears to have engaged in what could be described as defamatory mischaracterizations of Karl's reputation and character, attempting to make Karl appear responsible for Deacon Pinto's behavior and asserting that the situation was "consensual", *which it was not*. Instead of addressing Deacon Pinto's behavior, Director Roth and the Archdiocese of Baltimore are now retaliating against Karl, including actively attempting to remove Karl from priestly formation altogether. Late in the day on Tues., Oct. 29, 2019, Fr. Roth, along with Chancellor Diane Barr and Msgr. Jay O'Connor, sent Karl a digitally written directive stating that Karl must attend a two-hour long meeting the very next day (less than 24 hours later) with Archdiocesan attorneys regarding the Pinto matter, and that Karl was absolutely not permitted to have his own attorney and counsel accompany him. According to United States' law, such a directive is illegal. It is Karl's understanding that this directive was sent with the full knowledge and authorization of Archbishop William Lori. Karl maintains the original digital directive from O'Connor, et al., and has provided a copy to his attorney, as well.

This has come at the end of 5 years of harassment over the reporting of clergy sexual harassment within the seminary process itself. Karl was first subject to such harassment while in college seminary at St. John Paul II (JPII) College Seminary in Washington, D.C. from then Vice-Rector and now Rector, Fr. Carter Griffin. When Karl reported this matter to his superiors at the seminary, Karl was met only with continued refusal to listen and attempts to silence him. Fr. Griffin dismissed Karl's reports by telling Karl that Karl's experience of sexual harassment

perpetrated by Griffin himself could never have happened, because, Griffin stated, “people in my position don’t do things like that.” Karl’s reports of sexual harassment were dismissed even by his spiritual director, Fr. Mark Ivany, as having “come from the evil spirit.” When Karl reported the harassment to his superiors in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, including then Vocation Director Fr. James Sorra and another priest who functions as a Vocation Associate, Fr. Gerald Francik, nothing was done to address the harassment and abuse; instead, retaliatory actions were taken against Karl by Fr. Sorra, Msgr. Panke, then rector of JPPII Seminary, and Fr. Griffin to have Karl removed from formation, as well as mandating what was later termed by current Vocation Director Roth as a “retaliatory pastoral year”. While the sexual harassment Karl endured during college seminary has never been addressed, Karl had hoped that at least once away from JPPII Seminary, he would be able to discern his priestly vocation without having to deal with sexually harassing behavior from clergy. Unfortunately, Deacon Pinto’s sexually and otherwise harassing behavior and those who appear to be protecting him have made that hope once again unable to be fulfilled.

At this time, given the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s refusal to address Pinto’s behavior or place any boundaries around his conduct, Karl has had no choice but to act to protect himself from the continued harassment and stress that this harassment has caused by taking medical leave. Karl has begun sharing about the harassment he is experiencing with others, including a physician and other hospital personnel after he was admitted to the ER with chest pain and elevated blood pressure on the morning of Wed., Oct. 30th. The onset of these symptoms occurred directly as a result of the lack of effective action to protect Karl from the continuing harassment as well as the stress of being given what could only be viewed as an ultimatum to comply with the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s illegal directive, with the unstated implication being that Karl must either comply with this directive or be removed from formation. In addition, medical leave was strongly recommended to Karl as a means to protect himself by the hospital social worker and others to whom Karl has described the harassment he has been enduring and the lack of any effective response by Fr. Roth and the Archdiocese of Baltimore to protect him.

With regard to this first matter, we do not understand the lack of willingness on the part of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to hold Deacon Pinto - a man brand new to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, an adult in his mid-to-late 40’s and the recipient of Holy Orders from the Diocese of Trenton - accountable for his behavior. Instead, the Archdiocese appears to want to re-frame Deacon Pinto’s harassment of Karl as consensual. Fr. Roth exemplified this re-framing with Roth’s extremely offensive assertion that Karl “enjoyed” Deacon Pinto’s sexually harassing behavior, stating that Karl “enjoyed licking” Pinto. Karl has attempted at every opportunity to make it absolutely clear to Fr. Roth and to all and wishes to state once more unequivocally that **Deacon Pinto’s sexual advances and other harassing behavior toward Karl were always and in every instance unwelcome, unwanted, and inappropriate.** Paradoxically, it is our understanding that Fr. Roth was placed in the position of Vocation Director due to his expressed interest in resolving Karl’s experience of sexual harassment at JPPII Seminary and the subsequent attempts by priests at JPPII and Fr. Sorra to remove Karl from formation. Once Fr. Roth assumed the position of Vocation Director, however, it has been Karl’s observation that the goal of resolving the JPPII matter was for some reason abandoned and now it appears that Fr. Roth has adopted the very same troubling tactics as his predecessor, Fr. Sorra, in attempting to silence Karl and have him removed from formation as a result of Karl’s reporting of continued sexual and general harassment from Deacon Pinto. Sadly, Fr. Roth appears to have taken these troubling tactics one step further when, together with other Archdiocesan attorneys and representatives, Roth directed Karl to participate in an official, two-hour long meeting with Archdiocesan attorneys and representatives while denying Karl the right to have his own legal counsel present. As stated previously, Karl has been advised that *such a directive is illegal in the United States*. We do not find this kind of behavior on the part of

Vocation Director Roth or any of the other clergy involved to be compatible under any circumstances with the priesthood.

Finally, Fr. Roth's antagonism toward Karl marks a significant departure from Fr. Roth's historical view of Karl, as evidenced in Fr. Roth's glowing review of Karl when Karl served a pastoral assignment under Fr. Roth's supervision when Fr. Roth was pastor of St. Isaac Jogues Church in Parkville, Maryland. Karl has provided a copy of that review to his attorney.

The same can be said of Msgr. James Barker's sudden turnaround in disposition toward Karl. Msgr. Barker has known Karl since Karl was just 6 years old. Karl was an active altar server for many years, and even worked as part of the St. Ignatius maintenance crew for several summers. Msgr. Barker always expressed only the highest regard for Karl and Karl's personal integrity and positive character, with Barker even describing Karl in a letter to Archbishop Lori that Barker had written in defense of Karl against the priests at JPll and Fr. Sorra as a "holy" young man. It is very puzzling to Karl and our family that Msgr. Barker has assumed such an antagonistic position against Karl ever since Karl began speaking up about Deacon Pinto's unwanted, unwelcome and inappropriate advances. Msgr. Barker, along with Fr. Roth, had given our family copious assurances in May that Pinto had been told to "initiate no further contact with Karl whatsoever," and that Pinto "would not have anything more to do with St. Ignatius Parish", our home parish of nearly 2 decades. In spite of these assurances made in May, Msgr. Barker admitted in early October that he had been hosting Pinto as a regular, weekly overnight guest in the St. Ignatius rectory and then refused to "vouch" for Pinto's whereabouts and other activities at the parish with the exception of the hours between 10 p.m. Thursday - 8 a.m. Friday. These shocking revelations have made it necessary for our family to leave St. Ignatius Parish in order to protect our family, including our youngest children who are school-aged.

Lastly, this brings up another concern: namely, that Deacon Pinto - a clergy member with credible and unresolved complaints of continuing sexual and general harassment against him made by another seminarian almost half his age - has by virtue of his active ministry throughout the Archdiocese been given access to countless minors by Archbishop Lori, Vocation Director Roth and the Archdiocese of Baltimore. This seems to us to not be in compliance with VIRTUS child and youth safety protocols. Of most serious concern was the fact that Deacon Pinto was permitted to wander the dormitory area of Mt. St. Mary's Seminary - unaccompanied and during the night - during the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Quo Vadis Camp in July, 2019. Approximately 65 young men, the overwhelming majority of them minors, were in residence in the dormitory. Furthermore, Msgr. Barker's refusal to "vouch" for Pinto's activities and whereabouts at St. Ignatius Parish beyond a very narrow timeframe is also very troubling with regard to VIRTUS compliance.

Regarding the second matter:

Norman and Jennifer attempted to schedule a meeting with Vocation Director Roth in March 2019 to share serious, family-related concerns (including the severe depression and near death of oldest son, Falkner) with Fr. Roth, concerns directly related to Karl's experience of sexual and general harassment by Catholic clergy, which Karl has experienced throughout his 6 years of seminary formation, with most recently, the harassment from Deacon Pinto.

Fr. Roth, however, initially refused to meet with Norman and Jennifer, *citing as his reason for refusing to meet with them a discussion that had taken place during Sacramental Confession* between Jennifer and Msgr. Barker. We have full documentation of the e-mail exchange where these shocking revelations came to light, and would be happy to share these e-mails with investigators. When Fr. Roth did finally agree to meet with Norman and Jennifer, Fr. Roth stated

in no uncertain terms that Pinto had been instructed to “initiate no further contact with Karl whatsoever.” Fr. Roth has not abided by his own vehement assurances to us that Pinto would be required to comply with the directive to initiate no further contact with Karl - a directive that Msgr. Barker had told Jennifer in late May, 2019, had been given to Pinto by “all the bishops” of Baltimore.

Norman and Jennifer wrote a letter to Archbishop William Lori on October 1, 2019, marked “Personal and Confidential”, hoping for his assistance with this matter which has had such a harmful and traumatic effect upon the whole family, and has even resulted in the loss of our parish home of nearly 20 years. Unfortunately, no response was ever received from Archbishop Lori directly, although Jennifer was told that the letter, marked “personal and confidential”, had “made the rounds” of the downtown Archdiocesan offices without Norman or Jennifer’s knowledge or consent. Instead of receiving a response from Archbishop Lori himself, Jennifer received two phone calls from a woman attempting to arrange a “private meeting” between Norman and Jennifer and the Archdiocese’s principal attorney, Chancellor Diane Barr. Chancellor Barr, who had made the private meeting request, refused to disclose the purpose or scope of the meeting even after several requests for that information. A copy of the letter to Archbishop Lori has been enclosed for your inspection. As of this writing, no personal response has ever been received from the Archbishop, only from his various attorneys. As a direct result of this kind of response from the Archbishop, in addition to Karl, Norman and Jennifer also sought the assistance of attorneys.

At this time, we specifically seek your assistance in clearly resolving these two serious issues: firstly, the unresolved sexual and general harassment of Karl by an ordained transitional Deacon and the now additional, retaliatory harassment by the Archdiocese of Baltimore that has resulted in response to Karl’s repeated reports of this harassment and secondly, that an investigation commence into what Norman and Jennifer have experienced as a breach of the Seal of Confession by Fr. Roth and Msgr. Barker. From the very start, beginning with the first incident of sexual harassment many years ago, our sincere hope has been and remained for a charitable and honest conversation about all of these issues, with the goal of healing and restoration of trust. The uncharitable and dismissive treatment we have received from Archbishop Lori as well as Baltimore priests Roth, Barker, and O’Connor (to name a few) has been experienced by us as nothing less than spiritually abusive and highly traumatic for our entire family, a fact which the Archdiocese of Baltimore refuses to acknowledge or take any responsibility for. It is extremely painful if not at times impossible for us to attend Mass - anywhere - and we have developed a deep distrust of priests in general. In short, our experience of this spiritual abuse has had the effect of almost completely alienating us from the Catholic Church. Our family is struggling to discern what role the Church will have in our lives moving forward. Despite this treatment from the Archdiocese, Karl as well as Norman and Jennifer have tried **for years** to work toward healing and reconciliation. In sharp contrast, however, the Church has approached these matters very differently from the start, beginning by exercising its authority especially over Karl as a seminarian by initially ignoring his reports, and then by taking specific actions which appear to be nothing but attempts to shame and bully Karl and us into silence and acquiescence, with the threat of further punishment and retaliation for non-compliance. If that is not in fact the Church’s intent, their collective actions to-date do not lend themselves to any alternative conclusion.

The documents enclosed with this letter have already been provided to our attorneys, and detail what amount to **years** of sexual and general harassment, and what Karl and our family have experienced as spiritual, emotional and psychological abuse, as well as abuse of power due to what we have understood and observed to be willful, planned actions and decisions on the part of leaders in the Church. We also have additional documents to substantiate points raised in this letter. We, Karl, Norman and Jennifer, will no longer be told by the Church that we

are the problem because we have dared to speak out about on-going sexual and other harassment and abuses of power by the clergy. We will no longer be told by the Church to remain silent while an Archbishop and his priests continue to abuse their authority in an attempt to silence us. Our faith in the Church is being destroyed, and **no one**, not even our own pastor, priests, or even Archbishop, seems to care. We want the clergy responsible for this harassment and abuse - behavior which we find to be absolutely objectively incompatible with Holy Orders - held accountable for their actions and disciplined, as they should be in accordance with Canon Law and acts of **sincere** healing and reparation made to us for the years of suffering we have endured due to their actions. *This healing and reparation can begin only with an honest acknowledgment of the harassment and abuses that have occurred and a sincere desire on the part of those involved to take steps to correct it.* It is our consistent observation and experience, however, that the clergy involved are unwilling to take this necessary step. We are holding out hope that you will intervene on our behalf and that your involvement will function as a catalyst to move this situation forward in a positive direction. With your assistance, we look forward to a speedy and just resolution of these issues.

While we realize that there is a lot of information for your review in this packet, we would very much appreciate hearing from you within 10 days from the date of receipt.

Very truly yours in Christ,

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Enclosures:
Letter to Archbishop Lori
Formal complaint to Vocation Director - "Points for Fr. Steven"
Summary of Pinto Concerns and Timeline Spring 2019 - Present
Letter to Pinto/McLauchlin

Copy to: Eric E. McLauchlin, Esq.