

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE  
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE  
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

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*The following is the full text of the statement given to the New York Times on March 24, 2010:*

The tragic case of Father Lawrence Murphy, a priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, involved particularly vulnerable victims who suffered terribly from what he did. By sexually abusing children who were hearing-impaired, Father Murphy violated the law and, more importantly, the sacred trust that his victims had placed in him.

During the mid-1970s, some of Father Murphy's victims reported his abuse to civil authorities, who investigated him at that time; however, according to news reports, that investigation was dropped. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was not informed of the matter until some twenty years later.

It has been suggested that a relationship exists between the application of *Crimen sollicitationis* and the non-reporting of child abuse to civil authorities in this case. In fact, there is no such relationship. Indeed, contrary to some statements that have circulated in the press, neither *Crimen* nor the Code of Canon Law ever prohibited the reporting of child abuse to law enforcement authorities.

In the late 1990s, after over two decades had passed since the abuse had been reported to diocesan officials and the police, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was presented for the first time with the question of how to treat the Murphy case canonically. The Congregation was informed of the matter because it involved solicitation in the confessional, which is a violation of the Sacrament of Penance. It is important to note that the canonical question presented to the Congregation was unrelated to any potential civil or criminal proceedings against Father Murphy.

In such cases, the Code of Canon Law does not envision automatic penalties, but recommends that a judgment be made not excluding even the greatest ecclesiastical penalty of dismissal from the clerical state (*cf.* Canon 1395, no. 2). In light of the facts that Father Murphy was elderly and in very poor health, and that he was living in seclusion and no allegations of abuse had been reported in over 20 years, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith suggested that the Archbishop of Milwaukee give consideration to addressing the situation by, for example, restricting Father Murphy's public ministry and requiring that Father Murphy accept full responsibility for the gravity of his acts. Father Murphy died approximately four months later, without further incident.

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