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Catholic Sex Scandal at Deaf School Threatens Pope

by Misty Fauchoux

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The Roman Catholic Church is now embroiled in another sex abuse scandal after news broke on Thursday about a priest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who was accused of abusing more than 200 boys at St. John's School for the Deaf for more than 20 years.

Bishops Warn Pope of Abuse

According to Vatican documents from the mid-1990s, two Wisconsin bishops had urged then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, to allow them to pursue a church trial against the priest. Despite these allegations, Pope Benedict refused to sanction the trial after Reverend Lawrence Murphy, the alleged molester, wrote the Pope and said that he had repented his crimes and that he was sick.

The church simply ordered that the accused priest should not be allowed to give Mass outside of his own diocese. Murphy died in 1998.

Deaf Boys Were Priest's Victims

The priest has now been accused of molesting more than 200 deaf boys at the school from the 1950s until 1974. Pope Benedict has been defending his position not to remove the priest despite the knowledge of what Murphy had done.

The two Wisconsin bishops had taken their stance to hold the trial against Murphy to try and forestall the present scandal. They felt that the trial would have gone a long way to subdue parishioners. Ratzinger's deputy, however, thought that the crimes had happened too long ago and took into account that the priest was sick at the time.

Deaf Boys Targeted in Confessional

Additional documentation from the period shows that many of the assaults started in the confessional. At least 100 boys were molested this way. One of the victims, Arthur Budzinski, voiced his opinion that Murphy targeted boys without deaf parents. Since these parents had trouble communicating with their children, there was less chance of him getting caught.

Back in 2004, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee began mediation with a number of victims and has paid an undisclosed amount of compensation to the victims. While the church won't release exact amounts, Budzinski has received \$80,000. In total, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has paid close to \$30 million to alleged victims of clergy abuse.

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