

Bevilacqua role with pedophile priest bared

February 23, 2011 | By DAVID GAMBACORTA



Turns out the old saying is true - the devil really is in the details.

Decades-old evidence of a pedophile priest whose crimes were covered up by church leaders came to light yesterday in the form of long-buried memos from the Diocese of Brooklyn.

Two names figure prominently on the haunting pages from the past.

The first is Romano J. Ferraro, a former priest who is serving a life sentence in Massachusetts for raping a child there, and who had a well-documented penchant for abusing children in New York.

The second is Anthony Bevilacqua, who, as an auxiliary bishop in Brooklyn in the late 1970s and early 1980s, knew all too well about Ferraro's fondness for preying on children, and dealt with it, according to the memos, by simply having Ferraro transferred to a church in St. Louis, where he allegedly abused three boys.

When Ferraro later tried to return to Brooklyn, Bevilacqua ordered his underlings to tell the serial sexual predator "to seek an assignment outside the diocese," according to one memo.

In another, Bevilacqua wrote that Ferraro refused to sign an agreement that called for him to be removed from the priesthood if he committed any more sexual misdeeds.

"It's a depressing scene all around," said Terence McKiernan, president of www.BishopAccountability.org, which features a detailed account of Ferraro's life as a pedophile priest.

"Ferraro abused children wherever he went," McKiernan said. "Some of that abuse wouldn't have happened if Bevilacqua had blown the whistle and called the cops when he had a chance."

The memos echoed what a Philadelphia grand jury asserted earlier this month - that Bevilacqua, a cardinal and retired archbishop of Philadelphia, was well-versed in the art of preventing abusive priests from facing justice.

"He was more savvy than most," said David Clohessy, executive director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). "If this is what they wrote down and saved, can you imagine what they considered too radioactive to write down, or what was shredded?"

SNAP released the documents yesterday and called for grand juries to form in Brooklyn and Pittsburgh, where Bevilacqua reportedly covered for another abusive priest.

The memos were obtained in 2009 by Miami attorneys Adam Horowitz and Jessica Arbour, who represented a man who sued Ferraro in 2006. The man claimed that the priest sexually assaulted him in the late 1960s when Ferraro worked as a chaplain on a Navy Base in Key West.

Ferraro was dishonorably discharged by the Navy in 1971 after allegations of abuse came to light, according to BishopAccountability.org.

Two years later, he began working at a parish in Brooklyn.

He landed in trouble almost immediately. In a July 1, 1973 letter written by Ferraro to Francis Mugavero, the then-bishop of Brooklyn, he mentioned seeing a psychologist and causing the bishop "anxiety" and "possible embarrassment to the diocese and the church."

In that same letter, Ferraro said that Bevilacqua, then a priest, had urged him to get help.

Four years later, a copy of a letter detailing Ferraro's attempts to get two young boys to talk about masturbation following a Mass that was held in one of the boy's homes was supposed to have been sent to Bevilacqua.

All told, Ferraro was reportedly accused of molesting at least four boys at various parishes in New York in the 1970s.

In two memos from December 1980, Bevilacqua wrote that Ferraro had promised to sign a statement "that he would be laicized if he ever was involved in another homosexual incident."

"He felt that he would not like to sign it because it was acting under threat," Bevilacqua wrote.

A few weeks later, Bevilacqua wrote another memo. He had arranged a new home for Ferraro: the archdiocese of St. Louis.

And the horror story continued.

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