

BishopAccountability.org

Family Upset at Decision to Clear Accused Priest:

Even though charges of abuse against Rev. Brian Brinker were found unsubstantiated, they want the diocese to bar him from working with children

By Rita Ciolli
Newsday
January 25, 2005

The Moraitis family was angry nine years ago when it complained to church officials that the Rev. Brian Brinker acted inappropriately toward their 14-year-old son during a trip to California. Now their feelings have turned to outrage after they learned yesterday that the Vatican has cleared the priest's return to ministry.

"It's just another thing that they do, every time they say they are going to do something good and make some reforms, nothing happens," said Matthew Moraitis, who is now 22, adding that it took several years for him to put the incident behind him. He wants assurances that Brinker, who was his confirmation sponsor and a longtime family friend, will not work with children again.

Moraitis and his parents expressed their anger after reading a news report that Bishop William Murphy is sending a letter to local Catholics updating the status of Long Island's clerical abuse cases, including Brinker's. Murphy, whose letter will be published tomorrow, writes that all 14 cases sent to the Vatican have been reviewed, resulting in eight priests being defrocked, three ordered to face church trials and two being cleared because charges against them were "unsubstantiated." No action was taken in the other case because of the priest's illness.

Diocese sources have confirmed that Brinker is one of two priests whose alleged misconduct was found to be unsubstantiated. Diocese officials would not say whether he will be returned to active ministry.

Brinker, 47, who has never spoken publicly about Moraitis' claims, was unavailable for comment yesterday.

Linda Moraitis, Matthew's mother, said she was assured by Msgr. Robert Batule, then Murphy's troubleshooter for abuse complaints, in a telephone conversation in the summer of 2002 that Brinker would not be placed back in parish work.

Sean Dolan, a spokesman for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, said in an e-mail yesterday that "Monsignor Batule never made a promise relating to Fr. Brian Brinker's assignment - that is whether Father Brinker would or would not be placed into parish ministry. As delegate for Pastoral Intervention at the time, it was not his role to make promises as to the assignment of a priest. Priests are assigned at Bishop Murphy's discretion."

Even though word of the Vatican decision came last spring, Brinker has yet to receive a new assignment, sources in the diocese said. The second priest cleared, Rev. Michael Carroll, has a limited assignment saying mass for nuns on the grounds of Mercy Hospital.

Linda Moraitis said yesterday that no one from the diocese advised the Farmingdale family of the outcome of their charges, a continuation of the difficulties that began when she first told them in 1996 of her son's allegations.

After Matthew told her what happened during a vacation trip Brinker had given him, Moraitis went to the police and also complained to the Rev. Alan Placa, then vice chancellor of the diocese. When

Placa came to their home, Matthew told him that Brinker offered him wine on the flight and rubbed his stomach. Later on, in a Las Vegas hotel room, the priest allegedly asked him to take off his bathing suit before going into a Jacuzzi and later to watch pornographic movies. Moraitis said that he rebuffed the priest each time and locked himself in his room.

Linda Moraitis said the Nassau police told her the alleged incident happened outside their jurisdiction and, that when she followed up with Placa, she was informed that Brinker had been sent for psychiatric testing. Nothing more happened, she said, until the spring of 2002, when the national priest abuse scandal unfolded. Then, Moraitis said, she received a surprise call from a diocesan official who said he "wanted to call and see how things were going."

She then renewed her complaint only to receive a call a few days later from Murphy, who said he had reviewed the file and Brinker's psychiatric report and found nothing in it that would preclude Brinker from working as a priest.

However, after Newsday wrote an April 10, 2002, story about the case, Brinker was suspended from acting publicly as a priest.

Now, Moraitis fears that what happened to her son can happen again. "I don't feel this priest should be serving in the church, he doesn't deserve that privilege, not at all. I don't know what I can do to stop it," said Moraitis, who taught religious education for 14 years and is employed by the diocese as a secretary in her parish.

Her son has the same frustration. "A simple statement that Brinker will never again be put in this ministry, that is all I want," said Moraitis, who works in the restaurant industry.

[Photo caption: Rev. Brian Brinker.]

Any original material on these pages is copyright © BishopAccountability.org 2004. Reproduce freely with attribution.