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Family's New Outrage: Says Bishop Insists Accused Priest Can Resume His Duties

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Bishop William Murphy has told a Farmingdale family that a priest the family filed a complaint against in 1996 for acting inappropriately with their 14-year-old son during a trip away from home should be allowed to return to active work.

"He said he saw no reason why this man should not continue with his duties" as a parish priest, said Linda Moraitis, the teenager's mother. "I was completely outraged. I said, 'Why is he a priest at all?'"

The 1996 complaint - filed with Nassau County police and the Diocese of Rockville Centre - accused the Rev. Brian Brinker of inappropriately touching Matthew Moraitis on an airplane trip to San Francisco. Matthew Moraitis said Brinker, while they were staying in a Las Vegas hotel on one leg of the trip, also invited him into his bed to watch pornographic movies and made other questionable comments. In each case, Matthew Moraitis said, he rebuffed Brinker.

Linda Moraitis said Murphy called her on Sunday to say he had reviewed Brinker's file - and a psychiatric report completed after the family's complaint - and found nothing that would preclude him from working as a priest. She said Murphy and another diocesan official had told her in earlier phone calls that Brinker, who most recently served as a priest at the Cathedral of St. Agnes in Rockville Centre, has been on leave since mid-March.

Messages left for Brinker, 45, were not returned. Msgr. Francis Caldwell, who is in charge of assigning priests for the diocese, said the family only told the diocese about the touching. He said he knew nothing about any trip.

"What we had was that Father Brian touched him in public on the stomach," Caldwell said. He said a psychiatric report done on Brinker for the diocese showed Brinker "was not a threat to young people."

But Matthew Moraitis, who is now 19, said the incident was more complicated than that, and the family - including his mother and father, Chris - said diocesan officials were given all the details about the trip, which Brinker had set up as a present for the boy after Brinker served as Matthew's confirmation sponsor.

On the flight to California, Moraitis said Brinker offered the then 14-year-old boy wine to drink. "Then he said, 'You really have a nice body on you. You should be a gym teacher.' Then he asked me if I thought he looked like Tom Cruise. He looked at me and took his hand and put it on the lower part of my stomach and was rubbing it. I moved his hand away. He tried it once more and I moved it away again."

That night, the two stayed in the same room in Las Vegas. "There was a jacuzzi in the bathroom. I had a bathing suit on," Matthew Moraitis said. "He started up the jacuzzi. He said, 'Why don't you take off your bathing suit, it's very comfortable. I said no and locked the door.

"He started knocking on the door." Moraitis added, asking, "'Why do you have the door locked?' That same night I was on my bed. He said, 'Do you want to rent one of these movies?' There were

pornographic movies he could pick from. I said, 'No, it's okay.'

"Then he asked me to get in his bed if I wanted to use the remote control. I said no."

When they returned, Matthew Moraitis said he told his sister what happened. She told their parents, and they called police and filled out a complaint. Yesterday, Sgt. Richard Zito, head of Nassau's Special Victim's squad, confirmed the complaint. What happened was inappropriate, he said, but not a crime.

Linda Moraitis then complained to the diocese, speaking to the vice chancellor, Msgr. Alan Placa, at their home. "Matthew told him everything" about the trip, she said. "He said he would talk to the priest and call me back.

"I spoke to him [Placa] again and he said, 'Yes, something happened.' He said Brinker would go for some kind of psychiatric testing."

Yesterday, Caldwell said he was concerned about Matthew, but added, "I'm concerned that what they're saying now is a lot different than what they told us."

Placa, meanwhile, was not available for comment about what the family told him, and diocesan spokeswoman Joanne Novarro didn't return calls throughout the day seeking comment from the bishop.

Last month, the Moraitis' said they received a call from the diocese asking to meet to talk about Brinker. While no meeting took place, Linda Moraitis said Caldwell called her Friday to ask her if she had spoken to a reporter.

"He said to me, 'We need to get our stories in sync.'" she said. "He acted like he cared more about Brinker's name getting out than what happened to our son."

On Sunday, she said, the bishop called. "He said there was nothing in the records to keep him [Brinker] on a leave," she said. "He said the police report was not credible to keep him out. I told the bishop he believed his priest and not my son."