

Most Reverend John Neinstedt D.D., S.T.D.
Office of the Archbishop
266 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102

May 31, 2014

Your Excellency,

We were saddened to hear that Father Timothy Backous O.S.B., known in the area as Father Timo, was allowed to preside at mass in the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis this past Memorial Day weekend.

Years ago, we were active members of our parish in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where my wife and I were both serving as choir directors. We encouraged our children to be active in the Church. They are gifted in music and we were proud when our son auditioned for and was selected to join the Saint John's Boys' Choir, under the direction of Brother Paul Richards, in 1988. In the summer of 1990, our son toured Europe with the Boys' Choir. Father Backous went along as a chaperone.

On return from the European tour our son was noticeably different. His demeanor had drastically changed. He was deeply disturbed, physically violent, and had angry outbursts which was not behavior he exhibited prior to the tour. We were horrified when he told us that he had been sexually abused by Father Backous.

We reported the abuse to the Stearns County Sheriff and to Abbot Jerome Theisen O.S.B. of Saint John's Abbey. The sheriff told us that his department had no jurisdiction, since the conduct occurred in Europe.

At St. John's, we reported the abuse to Brother Paul Richards who was shocked and sympathetic. Later, when meeting with Abbot Jerome and Brother Paul together, we got the distinct feeling that Brother Paul was no longer on the side of our son. He appeared dismissive and even hostile.

It seemed that Abbot Theisen was listening and wanted to take steps to fix the problem. We were promised that Father Backous would be immediately removed from his involvement with the Boys' Choir, and that he would be sent away to receive treatment. We were also promised that he would be barred from having any contact with children and students at St. John's.

At this point, Abbot Theisen agreed to pay the cost of counseling related to the abuse of our son.

Since the life-changing events that occurred decades ago, our family has done its best to pick up the pieces and be supportive to our son. It is difficult as parents, knowing what he's going through and watching him suffer. We have had no interest in matters involving Saint John's Abbey or Father Backous for many years, thinking him far away at a treatment facility. However, we did pay attention when Abbot John Klassen O.S.B. of Saint John's Abbey and Bishop Donald Kettler of Saint Cloud recently said publicly that there are no priests in ministry with accusations against them. We had our suspicions, having heard in other news reports, about files in the Archdiocese' possession pertaining to abusive monks and clergy. The Abbey was acutely aware of predators on campus who were then moved around within the church.

The Abbey has chosen to ignore our good faith report of sexual abuse by Father Backous and allowed him to serve as Head Master of the St. John's Preparatory School. Our faith was once again shattered by hearing that Father Timothy Backous was allowed to say mass at the Basilica earlier this month.

We are now bringing this matter to your attention, and ask that you take corrective measures to investigate and, more importantly, do not allow Father Timothy Backous O.S.B., through his position as a priest, to have any further access to children.

Sincerely,


C.C. Abbot John Klassen OSB, Ph.D.
Bishop Donald Kettler D.D., J.C.L.