Lawyer outlines Gauthe case

(EDITOR’S NOTE: A recent article by Jason Berry in The Time of Acadiana accused Bishop Gerard Frey and Vicar General Larroque of engaging in a coverup in the Gilbert Gauthe case and an editorial in the same publication called for the resignation of both Frey and Larroque. Due to the seriousness of the allegations The Advertiser interviewed Diocesan attorney Bob Wright and Bishop Frey about their response to the charges.

Mr. Berry has, in my opinion, made some very inflammatory, inaccurate and unfair statements when he alleges that Bishop Frey and Msgr. Larroque have participated in a cover-up of these matters resulting from the activities of Gilbert Gauthe.

He goes on to say that in most cases Bishop Frey and Msgr. Larroque knew of the priest’s sexual problems and failed to take strong disciplinary actions. The correct set of circumstances are these:

In 1974, about a year after Bishop Frey became the Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette, it was learned from an outside source that about a year earlier Gauthe had improperly touched a boy in Broussard. Upon learning that, Bishop Frey ascertained that Gauthe had received psychiatric treatment. Gauthe came to the Bishop and in his skilled way thoroughly convinced the Bishop that if he had had any problems that these problems had been overcome and that he was very capable of serving as a priest. In 1976, he was transferred to Vermillion Parish.

In 1976, another priest reported to Bishop Frey’s office that Gauthe had apparently kissed two boys on their cheeks when he awakened them in the morning. Kissing the children on the cheek can be taken in a number of different ways, but apparently from past experience, Bishop Frey again immediately demanded that Gauthe undergo intensive psychiatric observation.

Again, unfortunately, following this information and being convinced that Gauthe didn’t have any deep-seated problem, the Bishop did allow him to return to the church. I say unfortunately because now in hindsight, we know that Gauthe was, in fact, a pedophile. Looking back in hindsight over ten years, the Bishop recognized that he made a mistake in allowing the fellow to go back. But if you also recall the word pedophilia was hardly known by law people until very recently. I dare say only medical experts know what the word pedophilia is all about.

But, nevertheless, on June 30, 1983, Bishop Frey was informed very clearly that Gauthe was involved.

“Mr. Berry has made some very inflammatory, inaccurate and unfair statements in alleging a cover-up.”

Bob Wright

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with molesting minor children. He took immediate action of dismissing him as Associate District Attorney, a position he had held for three years. The District Attorney has merely responded by citing the fact that Wright has been employed by the zoo throughout the year.

On August 11, 1983, Bishop Fargen was informed that the matter had been brought to the attention of the District Attorney, who had already been sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Chief Dist. Atty. Fargen wrote a letter to the attorney for the Bishop asking for the District Attorney to investigate the case. That District Attorney had made contact with the office about the matter, and no response was received from the Bishop. The letter was returned to the Bishop with a notation that the District Attorney had not received a response.

On August 12, 1983, Bishop Fargen was informed that the matter had been brought to the attention of the District Attorney, who had already been sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Bishop Fargen wrote a letter to the District Attorney asking for the investigation to be continued. That District Attorney had made contact with the office about the matter, and no response was received from the Bishop. The letter was returned to the Bishop with a notation that the District Attorney had not received a response.

On August 15, 1983, Bishop Fargen was informed that the matter had been brought to the attention of the District Attorney, who had already been sentenced to 30 years in prison.

The District Attorney did not respond to the Bishop, and the Bishop was informed that the matter had been brought to the attention of the District Attorney, who had already been sentenced to 30 years in prison.

To be copied

Wright outlines Gauthie legal case

The Diocese, again at the insistence of the Bishop and his counselors, stepped forth and again assumed all financial responsibility for the care and support of the child who had been harmed.

WRIGHT: The Bishop insists that because of some oversights, misjudgments, whatever, in his past control or supervision of Gauthie, that he and, therefore, the Diocese should accept financial responsibility and they have done so from the outset.

The Bishop and his staff have done everything they could to try and resolve and clear these matters up while, at the same time, doing everything they can to alleviate the suffering and pain to the people who have been adversely affected.

ADVERTISER: In the conclusion that there was $35 million in damages representing 15 children way out of line.

WRIGHT: I don’t know what the total amount is. He says that the damages have not been substantiated more than the $35 million per victim which has been paid out in past settlements. That’s the statement that I say is inaccurate. It has not been $35 million per settlement paid out for those that have been settled.

ADVERTISER: Is there any more to take any kind of legal action over these articles?

WRIGHT: Well, my testing and my recommendation is to The Diocese to see if they can continue to evaluate the situation and make a decision at the appropriate time.

ADVERTISER: What about the allegations that Bishop Fargen himself was involved in any of the cases?

WRIGHT: Well, I think that is ludicrous. In the context of what I have told you, it is impossible for the Bishop to have been, upon learning of any activity, taken any action because he is not in a position to do so. He has no legal authority to act.

ADVERTISER: What about the conclusion that these men, Father and Bishop, were in positions where they would be in contact with anyone?

WRIGHT: To suggest that the Bishop or the Catholic Church would knowingly put any person in a position where they would be in contact with anyone is ridiculous.

If any investigation has been performed by Mr. Berry, as he suggests, he will find, as I have in my investigation, that he was a very, very popular person in the Diocese.

He was very close to the young people. I think that’s borne out by the fact that he was involved, every parent, every

single parent, will attest to the fact that they had great confidence in Gauthie. He was a strictly devotional, pious person. So good that he fooled everyone. He served very closely with the sheriff’s department. He would attend every wreck. He would go way beyond the normal call of duty by trying to help people. So, unless you were a medical expert capable of knowing that this was the phallic act, you wouldn’t have believed that Gauthie was an exceptionally good and dedicated person. In hindsight, the Bishop accepts that he made a mistake. If anybody can get back here now and look in a mirror over the past 10 or 12 years and say we should have known that in the past, he is obviously more clairvoyant than Bishop Fargen was.

ADVERTISER: Just a little off the subject. Has anything come out of the recent court cases at the Diocese?

WRIGHT: It is still under investigation in my knowledge.

ADVERTISER: Do you think there is any connection with the breaks and the cover-up charges or pending litigation?

WRIGHT: No, not necessarily. There again, I have no basis for the statement other than my own intuition. I just think it is coincidental. I can’t conceive of anybody involved in any of these cases who think there is anything of value to be gained in the diocesan offices.