

# Priest apologizes for not recalling letter about halting Murphy trial

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – A priest who was involved in the canonical trial of a priest accused of abusing deaf children decades ago has admitted he made a mistake when he said then-Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland never told him to halt the trial.

Father Thomas Brundage, who was presiding judge in the 1996-98 trial against Father Lawrence Murphy on charges of child sexual abuse and solicitation within the confessional, said he recently was reminded of a letter he drafted in which Archbishop Weakland advised the Vatican that he had instructed Father Brundage “to formally abate the case.”

“I had not seen that letter in nearly 12 years,” wrote Father Brundage, now moderator of the curia and judicial vicar in the Archdiocese of Anchorage, in an April 3 clarification published on the Web site of the Catholic Anchor, Anchorage archdiocesan newspaper.

“In all honesty, I do not remember this memo but I do admit to being wrong on this issue and I apologize for my mistake,” he added. “Father Murphy’s death two days after Archbishop Weakland’s Aug. 19, 1998, letter (to the Vatican) made the matter moot as, de facto, death permanently abated the case.”

Father Brundage had said in a March 29 article on the Catholic Anchor Web site that he was never told to halt the trial of Father Murphy, who served at St. John’s School for the Deaf in Milwaukee from 1950 to 1974 and was believed to have abused dozens of children during that time.

“Had I been asked to abate this trial, I most certainly would have insisted that an appeal be made to the supreme court of the church, or Pope John Paul II if necessary,” he wrote in the earlier article. “That process would have taken months if not longer.”

Father Brundage said April 3 that since he no longer had access to the original files

in Milwaukee, he had based the first article on case files that had been posted on the Web site of the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel newspaper. The Aug. 15, 1998, draft that became a letter from Archbishop Weakland to Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, then secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was not among those documents, he said.

The priest apologized “for making a very complicated and painful case even more complicated and painful.”