



Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

Catholic Pastoral Center • 1615 West Washington • Springfield, Illinois 62702-4757
www.dio.org (217) 698-8500 Fax: (217) 698-0802

Office of the Bishop

STATEMENT OF BISHOP THOMAS JOHN PAPROCKI REGARDING FATHER THOMAS DONOVAN

January 19, 2012

There have been many stories circulating in the media and on the Internet about the 911 call for assistance made on November 28 by Father Thomas Donovan, Pastor of Saint Aloysius Parish Springfield, Illinois. Since some of those stories are untrue and even defamatory, I wish to provide as much factual information as possible about what happened and how it is being addressed.

As described in the transcript of Father Donovan's 911 call and in the police report, both of which have been released to the public, Father Donovan had bound himself in handcuffs and called for assistance when he was unable to remove them. The police officers state that he was alone and fully clothed when they arrived at the rectory. There was no indication that anyone else had been present. No crime was committed, no one was arrested, no alcohol or drugs were involved.

I was first informed of this incident on December 6th. On December 8th, I met with Father Donovan and Monsignor Carl Kemme, my Vicar General, in my office at the Catholic Pastoral Center. Father Donovan said that he was mortified by what happened and acknowledged that the information that had been reported to me was basically accurate. He insisted that he had been alone the whole time of this incident and denied that there was any sexual component to this.

Following our discussion, Father Donovan requested a leave of absence, which I granted. Monsignor Kemme celebrated the Masses at St. Aloysius Church on the weekend of December 15-16, informing the parishioners of Father Donovan's leave of absence and my appointment of Monsignor David Lantz, Pastor of St. John Vianney Parish in Sherman and St. James Parish in Riverton, as temporary parochial administrator of St. Aloysius Parish. Monsignor Kemme also read a statement to the parishioners from Father Donovan in which he said, "While I have not been involved in anything illegal or anything otherwise jeopardizing the safety, welfare, or morals of other persons, I have been responding to the stresses of priestly ministry in a way that has come to compromise my own personal safety and welfare. I am under the care of a doctor to get the assistance that I need."

With Father Donovan's consent to disclose private patient information, I wish to inform you that he is being treated by a clinical therapist and is receiving appropriate medical care. A thorough review of Father Donovan's work and lifestyle patterns reveals multiple significant unresolved stressors derived from parish ministry, and severely-compromised patterns of self-care with respect to diet, exercise, sleep, work hours, and unreasonable personal expectations of himself as a pastor.

The unfortunate result of such patterns of life—in no way limited to the experience of Catholic priests—is that persons often find themselves seeking patterns of ‘self-medication’ to soothe emotional turmoil. Alcoholism, the use of illicit drugs, compulsive gambling, sexual acting out and the use of pornography are some of the more common manifestations, none of which were present in this situation. Instead, according to the clinical therapist, Father Donovan is suffering from a psychological condition that manifests itself in self-bondage as a response to stress.* The clinical therapist also confirms that the strict absence of illicit sexual behaviors, relationships, and patterns reveal that this self-bondage is to be understood as non-sexual in nature.

Father Donovan appears to have been completely forthright with me in his account of this event, which is consistent with the public record. In the face of the embarrassment of these revelations, the subsequent attention of the press, and the widespread distribution of misinformation found on the Internet and elsewhere, he asks for the basic respect of accurate reporting of the event, the correction of untrue defamatory information arising from unsubstantiated rumors and claims, and the privacy now to heal from the trauma of this event and the original stress that precipitated it.

Although the psychological explanation of non-sexual self-bondage provides some context to what occurred, yet the details of this incident are understandably disturbing. In order to address these concerns, Father Donovan is on an indefinite leave of absence for an extended period of professional help and spiritual renewal in order to understand and address the issues that have resulted in this very tragic situation. I know he would be most appreciative of your thoughts and prayers during this time of soul searching, healing, and rebuilding of his priestly life.

It is my intention to present his case to a special panel established by my predecessor, Archbishop George Lucas, which is chaired by Mr. J. William Roberts, former U.S. attorney and former Sangamon County state’s attorney. In particular, I will seek the guidance and direction of this Special Panel for Professional Responsibility and parish leaders on the question of Father Donovan’s suitability for return to ministry.

In the meantime, as I pray for Father Donovan and the people of Saint Aloysius Parish, I ask that you pray for them also.

###

*Non-Sexual self-bondage as defined by clinical therapist: “Non-sexual self-bondage is a not well-researched phenomenon in which a person administers some form of physical self-restraint for the purpose of reducing stress or tension build-up but without sexual arousal. Many people are aware of sadomasochistic sexual bondage between two or more persons and may be aware of self-bondage for the purpose of sexual arousal. However, non-sexual self-bondage occurs when a person who has experienced significant stress in youth, or in a mature work environment or other traumatic situation such as war, chooses to use bondage as a way of lessening the perceived stress carried in the body and mind. This choice appears to be a maladaptive means of stress reduction because it can be dangerous, cause public embarrassment, and be linked to negative self-acceptance which results when a person is not using stress reduction that is more obviously self-care and conforms to cultural or societal expectations. Mental health diagnoses are based on the problems caused to the person by that person’s own behavior or the behavior of others to which the person responds in a way that his or her society deems not only strange but potentially dangerous to the person of the patient or others. Non-sexual self-bondage is not a recognized mental health diagnosis at this time.”