

ON THE MATTER OF THE REMOVAL OF FR. PAUL GOFIGAN AS PASTOR OF SANTA BARBARA CHURCH AND THE SLANDER AGAINST MR. JOSEPH LASTIMOZA

Submitted by Tim Rohr
timrohr.guam@gmail.com
December 28, 2014, Hagatna, Guam

July 16, 2013. Fr. Paul Gofigan is called to a meeting with Archbishop Anthony Apuron and Msgr. David C. Quitugua, the Vicar General. At the meeting he is read a letter ¹ :

- accusing him of disobeying an order from the Vicar General to terminate an employee two years previously
- accusing him of causing “grave harm to the parish...especially the youth” and creating “a lasting and potential threat to the safety and well-being” of his parishioners and staff
- demanding his immediate resignation as pastor of Santa Barbara parish or face a more “arduous and painful closure to your assignment”
- telling him to go “look for a benevolent bishop willing to accept you.”

According to Fr. Gofigan, upon returning to his office, Fr. Gofigan finds himself locked out of his office - the archbishop having ordered the locks changed while he was at the meeting with the archbishop.

July 17, 2013. The very next day Fr. Paul Gofigan is officially removed as pastor of his parish by an Aviso ² appointing Rev. Father Dan Bien as the Parochial Administrator of Santa Barbara Church, upon which Fr. Gofigan is then:

- removed from the schedule of presiders, effectively censuring him without due process
- told to vacate the rectory with no alternative residence provided

July 22, 2013. Fr. Gofigan writes to Archbishop Apuron stating his rejection of the archbishop’s demand that he resign and asserts his canonical rights for “basic due process”, all of which had been heretofore violated by the archbishop. ³

July 22, 2013. The chancery releases a public statement to the media ⁴ :

- accusing Fr. Gofigan of disobeying “ a directive from the Archbishop”
- implying that the subject employee was and is a danger to children: “A school full of children is in very close proximity to the parish.”

July 28, 2013. Fr. Gofigan writes Archbishop Apuron and requests a copy of his decree of removal and states his intention to seek “recourse to the author of the decree in accordance with C. 1734.1 and names his advocate: Father Adolfo N. Dacanay, S.J. ⁵

August 2, 2013. The Vicar General writes Father Gofigan saying that there is no decree of removal because he was never removed and that the letter of July 16, 2013 demanding his resignation was only an attempt to “persuade the pastor to resign.”⁶

August 20, 2014. Archbishop Apuron writes Father Gofigan:

- again accusing him of disobeying his 2011 instruction to terminate the employee
- again accusing the employee of being a danger to parishioners
- again accusing the employee of specifically being a danger to children
- claiming that there is no guarantee that the employee, who went to prison in 1981 for sexual assault, will never commit sexual assault again, thus justifying his accusation that the man is still a danger.
- again demands Fr. Gofigan’s resignation as pastor (even though he was already officially replaced with an administrator, effectively removing Fr. Gofigan as pastor and making a letter of resignation unnecessary.)⁷

Before we continue with the timeline, let us address some of the above:

- Upon being accused of disobeying Archbishop Apuron’s order to terminate the subject employee, a registered sex offender, Fr. Gofigan produced his letter⁸ to the employee terminating his employment at Santa Barbara parish dated October 26, 2011, proving that he had in fact obeyed Archbishop Apuron’s order when it was given.
- It was later discovered that the subject employee had in fact worked previously at Santa Barbara parish over a period of three years as a condition of his parole with the knowledge of Archbishop Apuron and long before Fr. Gofigan was made pastor of the parish.⁹ This shows that Archbishop Apuron did NOT consider the man, then only recently released from prison, to be all the dangers he makes him out to be 13 years later as the excuse for getting rid of Fr. Gofigan.
- Archbishop Apuron initially violates all the canons (1740-1752) relative to the removal of a pastor in his demand for the resignation of Fr. Gofigan.¹⁰
- Having violated all the canons and having been caught doing it, he backtracks saying his initial demand for resignation was only an attempt to “paternally persuade” Fr. Gofigan to resign (as required by canon law), and then on August 12, formally initiates the removal process as per canonical procedure and provisions.

August 12, 2013. As later noted in the official Decree of Removal¹¹, Archbishop Apuron initiates the removal process according to canonical procedure (a *de facto* admission that he previously violated the procedure) by convoking the required consultation with two pastors, Rev. Msgr. Brigido Arroyo and Rev. Fr. Jose Alberto Rodriguez.

August 20, 2013. Fr. Adolfo Dacanay files with Archbishop Apuron a Motion¹²

- to restore Fr. Gofigan to his office as pastor
- to clear his name
- to repair the damage done to his reputation

September 10, 2013. Archbishop Apuron ignores the Motion from Fr. Dacanay and informs Fr. Gofigan that he is “proceeding with the removal process observing the canonical norms”.¹³ *(Again, an admission that he previously did not follow canonical norms given that he had already on July 17, 2013, officially replaced Fr. Gofigan with an administrator. An administrator cannot be appointed to a parish unless the pastor’s office is vacant. Thus Archbishop Apuron upon appointing the administrator de facto admits that he had already removed Fr. Gofigan from his office, albeit illegally.)*

September 13, 2013. Fr. Gofigan writes Archbishop Apuron acknowledging receipt of his September 10 letter advising him of his intent to proceed “with the removal process” and states that since he is only now proceeding with the removal that

- it is apparent that he has not yet been removed from this office as pastor
- he be restored to his office as pastor “with all the consequences that follow therefrom.”

¹⁴

November 11, 2013. Fr. Gofigan’s advocate, Fr. A.N. Dacanay, S. J., provides Archbishop Apuron with a copy of “the appeal of Rev. Paul Gofigan in relation to his removal as Pastor of Santa Barbara Parish.”¹⁵ In the appeal, Fr. Dacanay:

- states that “**the charge against Fr. Gofigan has become an elastic concept**” (a reference to Archbishop Apuron’s “**mutating**” the charge against Fr. Gofigan from refusing to obey his order to terminate an employee to refusing to obey his order to terminate a “*de facto*” employee)
- details the “**procedural lapses in the manner the Archbishop acted**”
- criticizes the Vicar General’s August 02 assertion that Fr. Gofigan had no right to appeal his removal since he was not removed (even though he was)
- calls the Archbishop’s actions against Fr. Gofigan “**a canonical procedure that has gone awry**”
- accuses Archbishop Apuron of:
 - mangling canonical procedures,
 - ignoring provision of the Code,
 - making a feeble attempt to correct the bungled process,
 - violating the rights of a pastor,
 - and ruining his good name.
- He concludes by stating: “**The concerns raised by the Archbishop could have been accomplished even without the bungles attempt at removal, therefore one really wonders what is the real purpose behind the move.**”

November 12, 2013. Archbishop Apuron officially decrees the removal of Fr. Gofigan “from his office as pastor of Santa Barbara Church (three months after he de facto removed him by the appointment of a parochial administrator and locking him out of his office).”¹⁶

December 6, 2013. Fr. Gofigan writes Archbishop Apuron confronting him about remarks he (Apuron) made at recent clergy retreat in Manila wherein Archbishop Apuron heavily infers that Fr. Gofigan and Joseph Lastimoza, the subject employee, were involved in a homosexual relationship. Apuron alleges that Fr. Gofigan had gone so far as to construct a “stairway up to his room” so that the employee could visit him “in the middle of the night with cases of beer and what not and stay there until the early morning.” (The comments were recorded.) Fr. Gofigan calls these remarks “slanderous and defamatory” and demands “both a retraction and an apology in writing.” ¹⁷

January 13, 2014. Fr. Gofigan again writes Archbishop Apuron reminding him of his (Gofigan’s) demand for a retraction and apology which was “not provided” and advises that the Archbishop: “Your failure to retract those slanderous and defamatory statements leaves me no choice but to take steps to rectify your wrong and to salvage my name, which you have gone out of your way to ruin.” Fr. Gofigan concludes by giving the Archbishop until 14 Jan to make the request retraction in writing and if he (Apuron) fails to do so Fr. Gofigan “will take action (including legal action) to salvage my name.” ¹⁸

January 14, 2014. A meeting is arranged between Archbishop Apuron and Fr. Gofigan at which, according to Fr. Gofigan, Archbishop Apuron did not apologize but only suggested that “we cool off” and “let the canonical process run its course.” Gofigan advises Apuron: “I will continue to press my case both canonically and civilly.” ¹⁹

January 16, 2013. Fr. Gofigan writes Archbishop Apuron clarifying that there was no apology from Archbishop Apuron and that:

- there was only an excuse for the defamatory remarks
- that Apuron meant to “ruin and defame my name and that of Mr. Lastimoza”
- and all in an attempt to “bolster and justify your act in removing me on July 16th as pastor of Santa Barbara.” ²⁰

Fr. Gofigan was later assigned as a “priest in residence” to St. Anthony’s Church in Tamuning where he still awaits the outcome of his appeal.

As regards Joseph Lastimoza, the subject employee:

- Mr. Lastimoza was convicted of rape and manslaughter of an adult woman in 1981.
- He went to prison and was paroled in 1999.
- He served out the terms of his parole as a maintenance man at Santa Barbara Church from 03/30/99 to 03/29/02 without any objection from Archbishop Apuron. ²¹
- By his own admission, it was because of his association with Fr. Gofigan that Mr. Lastimoza returned to the Church, and as a married man and father of two, had been living a quiet, faith-filled life and one exemplary of the success of the corrections system. All of this was shattered by Archbishop Apuron on July 16, 2013 and

thereafter due to the continued statements about Mr. Lastimoza being a danger to parishioners and children by Archbishop Apuron.

Footnotes

¹ Letter from Archbishop Apuron to Fr. Paul Gofigan. July 16, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/221840769/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-07-16-Archbishop-Anthony-Sablan-Apuron-letter-to-Fr-Paul-Gofigan>

² Official Aviso. July 17, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251200447/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-07-17-04-AVISO>

³ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. July 22, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251201487/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-07-22-Gofigan-Refuses-to-Resign>

⁴ Archdiocese Statement Regarding Fr. Paul Gofigan. July 22, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/222412242/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-07-22-Chancery-Press-Release>

⁵ Email from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. July 28, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/221537908/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-07-28-Request-for-Copy-of-Decree>

⁶ Letter from Msgr. David C. Quitugua to Fr. Paul Gofigan. August 02, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251201731/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-08-02-Vicar-General-Letter-to-Fr-Gofigan>

⁷ Letter from Archbishop Apuron to Fr. Paul Gofigan. August 20, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/221843293/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-08-20-Archbishop-Anthony-Sablan-Apuron-letter-to-Fr-Paul-Gofigan>

⁸ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Joseph Lastimoza. October 26, 2011

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202065/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2011-10-26-Termination-Letter>

⁹ Community Service Record of Joseph Lastimoza. 03/30/99 to 03/29/02

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/244788132/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-Lastimoza-Community-Service-Records>

¹⁰ Code of Canon Law on the Removal of Pastors

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202234/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-Code-of-Canon-Law-Removal-of-a-Pastor>

¹¹ Decree of Removal of Fr. Paul Gofigan as Pastor of Santa Barbara Church. Archbishop Apuron. November 12, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/223636939/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-11-12-Decree-of-Removal>

¹² Motion to Restore Fr. Paul Gofigan to his office as pastor. Submitted by Fr. A.N. Dacanay, S.J., August 20, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/223638354/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-08-20-Motion-to-revoke-decree-of-removal>

¹³ Letter from Archbishop Apuron to Fr. Paul Gofigan. September 10, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/223637635/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-09-10-Letter-Apuron-to-Gofigan>

¹⁴ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. September 13, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202567/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-09-13-Letter-Gofigan-to-Apuron>

¹⁵ The appeal of Rev. Paul Gofigan in relation to his removal as Pastor of Santa Barbara Parish. Submitted by Fr. A.N. Dacanay, S.J. November 07, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202683/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-11-07-Appeal-of-Rev-P-gofigan>

¹⁶ Decree of Removal of Fr. Paul Gofigan as Pastor of Santa Barbara Church. Archbishop Apuron. November 12, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/223636939/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-11-12-Decree-of-Removal>

¹⁷ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. December 06, 2013

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/229679412/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2013-12-06-Gofigan-Letter-to-Apuron>

¹⁸ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. January 13, 2014

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202902/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2014-01-13-Gofigan-to-Apuron>

¹⁹ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. January 14, 2014

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202907/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2014-01-14-Gofigan-Press-Release>

²⁰ Letter from Fr. Paul Gofigan to Archbishop Apuron. January 16, 2014

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/251202911/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-2014-01-16-Gofigan-to-Apuron>

²¹ Community Service Record of Joseph Lastimoza. 03/30/99 to 03/29/02

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/244788132/Apuron-vs-Gofigan-Lastimoza-Community-Service-Records>

