

# Reverend Thomas M. O'Donnell

## Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1934
YEAR OF DEATH:	Unknown
ORDINATION:	May 21, 1960

## Employment/Assignment History

6/1960-5/1964	St. Kieran, Lawrenceville, PA
5/1964-6/1966	St. John the Evangelist, Pittsburgh, PA
6/1966-8/1971	St. Norbert, Pittsburgh, PA
9/1971-4/1975	St. Clare, Clairton, PA
5/1975-6/1983	Annunciation, Pittsburgh, PA
6/1983-7/2000	St. Wendelin, Carrick, PA
7/2000-9/2001	St. Maximilian Kolbe, Homestead, PA
9/2001-11/2005	St. John Vianney, Pittsburgh, PA
11/2005-8/2006	St. Cyril of Alexandria, Pittsburgh, PA
8/2006-7/2014	St. Mary of Mercy, Pittsburgh, PA
7/2014-Present	Epiphany, Pittsburgh, PA

## Summary

In 1988, parents complained to administrators at St. Wendelin that Father Thomas M. O'Donnell was requiring boys, who were around the age of 12 at the time, to shower after basketball games. It was reported that O'Donnell was also making them get weighed while they were naked. Many parents expressed displeasure that all of this was occurring while O'Donnell was present in the locker room and shower areas. The parents also noted that some of the children were embarrassed to get weighed while naked; however, they ultimately agreed to it at the insistence of O'Donnell.

In early November 1988, Father Guay and Father Nowicki met with O'Donnell who acknowledged that while these incidents did occur, it was an error in judgement. He further stated that other coaches were present in the locker room at the time. O'Donnell was advised that he was not to be in the locker room or shower areas moving forward.

In mid-November 1988, a group of 10 parents sent a letter requesting that O'Donnell completely resign from the athletic programs due to his inappropriate behaviors in the locker room. They noted that it had been confirmed with the Director of Diocesan Athletic Programs that there was no requirement that the children be weighed or measured. The letter further stated that O'Donnell had already defied a June, 1987 order given to him by Father Rutkowski to stay out of the locker rooms.

## Summary

In mid-November, 1988, a letter was also sent to Rutkowski from a parent who complained about the showering and nude weigh-in requirements. Then, another parent who had previously sent in a complaint, wrote that she was removing her child from the athletic program amid the inaction by the church to correct O'Donnell's behavior. On the same day, Rutkowski also met with Father Nowicki, Father Guay and Father Steidle about the situation.

In early December, 1988, Rutkowski sent a letter to O'Donnell wherein he outlined the complaints against him. He informed O'Donnell that he was to disassociate himself from the supervision of the athletic programs. Rutkowski also required that O'Donnell inform his coaching staff that showers and weigh-ins were not mandatory. On that same day, Rutkowski sent out a memorandum to the group of parents who had written the November letter. He advised that Diocesan officials met with O'Donnell on November 30, 1988 and that the matter was now resolved. It should be noted that there was no documentation in the file that Diocesan officials met O'Donnell on November 30, 1988.

From late December, 1988 through mid-March, 2002, parents continued to provide reports to the Diocese that O'Donnell had engaged in inappropriate behavior with children. In one instance, a parent disclosed that her son went on two trips with O'Donnell. During one of those trips, one of the boys had to sleep with O'Donnell twice. Another parent recounted that when her son and other players returned to St. Wendelin to shower after away games, it made O'Donnell excited. Another set of parents revealed that their son had a sexual conversation with O'Donnell and they requested that O'Donnell be removed from all children's programs. One parent advised that before her son entered eighth grade, he went on a trip with O'Donnell and other boys. When her son returned home, he was very upset and stated that he did not want to go anywhere with O'Donnell again. He told her that O'Donnell permitted the boys to undress in front of him, which made him [her son] uncomfortable. Next, a set of parents claimed that after their son went to a local wave pool with O'Donnell, O'Donnell insisted that her son and the other boys shower with him before getting into his car. Finally, a parent wrote a letter wherein she expressed that she could have done more to protect her child and others from O'Donnell. She stated that on one occasion, her son went to help O'Donnell with chores. When O'Donnell asked her son to wash the dog, O'Donnell insisted that her son get completely naked. Her son complied. The mother indicated that she approached O'Donnell about it, but no further information was provided about this encounter.

In late January 1989, the results of a psychological evaluation indicated that O'Donnell had no psychiatric issues. He was noted to be mentally fit to perform any duty.

In early June, 2000, Bishop Wuerl notified O'Donnell that he was being appointed full time judge to the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal and was relieved of his pastoral duties at St. Wendelin. On March 30, 2004, O'Donnell officially retired from the Diocese.

In November 2005, Wuerl assigned O'Donnell residency at St. Cyril to continue his role as a part-time judge and to assist the current pastor. Shortly afterwards, the principal of the St. Cyril grade school received two complaints concerning issues surrounding O'Donnell and his interactions with young children in his previous assignments.

## Summary

In a memorandum dated December 1, 2005, the Diocese documented a second encounter between one of the initial complainants and the principal. The complainant was a grandparent of a few students at the school. He stated that he was one of 12 families who went to the Diocese in 1981 to report O'Donnell's inappropriate behavior towards children on the different sporting teams. This behavior included being present in the locker rooms and posting a bulletin that required the young boys to shower after events. The complainant told the principal that he was not interested in bringing his allegations to the attention of the Diocese because the Diocese did nothing when he previously brought O'Donnell's behavior to its attention.

There was no documentation in the file that allegations of misconduct were received by the Diocese in 1981.

Shortly after the initial complaints regarding O'Donnell's residency at St. Cyril, Father Young notified Wuerl of these complaints as well as O'Donnell's past inappropriate behavior around children. Young noted that after reviewing O'Donnell's file and convening the Clergy Task Force, there was unanimous concern about that information surfacing in the public. They further indicated that a change of residency may be necessary to avoid a potential “. . . groundswell of gossip that might harm the reputation of one of our priests or possibly appear to be negative in terms of the diocese dealing with a situation that occurred in the past.”

In late November, 2005, Wuerl sent a memorandum to Young and Auxiliary Bishop Bradley wherein he requested that O'Donnell's file be reviewed again to ensure there was never an allegation of abuse received by the Diocese.

In early January, 2006, Diocesan officials met with O'Donnell regarding the recent complaints made to the principal of St. Cyril. O'Donnell stated that he never did anything to harm a child. The Diocesan staff cautioned O'Donnell not to spend time at the school for any reason moving forward.

In mid-March 2006, the Diocese contacted the principal at St. Cyril to ensure that there were no further allegations brought to her attention. The principal responded that while there were no new complaints, some of the children had remarked that O'Donnell was very nice to them during the First Reconciliation ceremony. The next day, Diocesan officials held another meeting with O'Donnell wherein he was questioned about, *inter alia*, why he was present during the First Reconciliation ceremony when he was cautioned not to be anywhere near the school. O'Donnell responded that he had been asked to help by Father Bruney. O'Donnell was instructed again not to be around the school for any reason.

In late November, 2006, O'Donnell applied to an Apostleship of the Sea program which required a letter from the Diocese that indicated that he was in good standing. Rushofsky, who had been present for the meetings with O'Donnell about the complaints against him, provided the letter.

## Summary

In late February, 2008, O'Donnell asked Bishop Zubik to provide another letter of good standing to re-certify him for the Apostleship at Sea program. In a letter from Father Bonnar to Zubik, the allegations made against O'Donnell were outlined. Bonnar advised that if Zubik believed that O'Donnell should be recommended for the program, the signature should not come from him. On the letter, Zubik initialed handwritten notations, which read in part that the matter needed to be discussed by the Special Clergy Task Force before any decision was to be made.

O'Donnell was ultimately informed that he would not be recommended for the program.

In January 2014, O'Donnell requested permission to attend a memorial mass performed by the United States Navy. The Navy required that a Diocesan representative provide a letter of good standing in order for O'Donnell to attend. The Diocese not only provided a letter of good standing, but also provided a form which indicated that all files and records maintained by the church about O'Donnell had been reviewed and the Diocese could attest to the following statements, *inter alia*: “No accusations of misconduct have ever been made against him, nor has he ever been involved in any incident, to my knowledge, which has led to potential or public scandal;” and “To the best of my knowledge, he has never engaged in sexual behavior inconsistent with priestly celibacy, nor has he ever acted in an inappropriate manner with minors.” Father Mark Eckman initialed the statements and signed the form attesting that O'Donnell was fully permitted to participate in the memorial event.