

  
 ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE  
 OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

August 8, 2005

Most Reverend Angelo Amato, SDB  
 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
 Piazza del S. Uffizio 11  
 00193 Rome, Italy

Your Excellency:

In accord with the norms of *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, I am submitting for your consideration the case of a priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Reverend Donald Peters has been accused of acts of sexual abuse of minors. The summary of these allegations is enclosed. Father Peters has admitted that a number of these acts of sexual assault occurred.

As we have reviewed the various files, it would appear that the original problem would date back to the 1960's and 1970's. While there is record of a formal notification of a problem in 1992, the anonymous nature of the report made it difficult to address. Father was informed of the report but he said he did not know to what it referred.

However, a closer review of correspondence from that period may reveal otherwise. In 1971 Archbishop William Cousins received a letter from Father Peters in which he makes reference to the need for a speedy transfer of assignment as recommended by Auxiliary Bishop Leo Brust as "the prudent way" given circumstances. A second note was sent to Bishop Brust from Father Peters stating that nothing should be committed to writing and no letter sent to those concerned. Archbishop Cousins transferred Father Peters to a new assignment a month later.

From the vantage point of hindsight, it would appear that this correspondence indicates that some inappropriate behavior had occurred at that time. Bishop Brust was the person who handled such matters and the usual response was to quietly see that the priest left his place of assignment.

When confronted with the allegations in 2002, Father Peters spontaneously admitted that there were incidents of sexual contact with minors in his past. He made this declaration to the investigating civil authorities and to the Vicar for Clergy. On that basis, Father was placed under precept not to exercise any public ministry. In 2004, as part of the attempt to bring resolution this situation, again Father Peters admitted that there were two or three others who might come forward. His dating of those incidents of sexual contact corresponds to the letters and mid-year change of assignment in 1971. Given the number of years that Father Peters was actively involved in the Boy Scouts, there is every reason to believe that additional victims may come forward.

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In the years since it was first issued, the precept has remained in place. I am of the opinion that the matter needs more concrete resolution. Given his age, I had proposed that Father Peters agree to live a life of prayer and penance while remaining under precept. He has been considering that option but knows that to do so would mean he would not have free reign to travel and live elsewhere in another diocese for six or more months of the year. He would need to remain in the Milwaukee Archdiocese to be monitored. He has been in consultation with two different canon lawyers. He has now concluded that he would rather be free to travel than to remain in the clerical state. He is choosing to seek voluntary laicization and his petition is enclosed. I have been assured by his present canonical advisor that this decision is being made freely and that he has been given sufficient counsel to make such a decision. This has not been a hasty or sudden judgement. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has paid for the services of a canonical advisor for him.

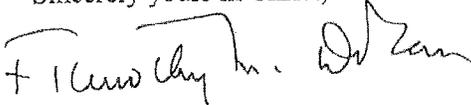
While it would have been my preference that he choose the first option given, a life of prayer and penance, he is unwilling to accept the conditions that would accompany that possibility. Given the legal liabilities, another diocese is not going to agree to monitor a priest for whom they have no responsibility. I regret that Father Peters has chosen as he has but I respect his right to do so.

Father Peters receives his full pension and will continue to do so since it is a qualified self-contributory plan. He owns a home in Wisconsin and one in Florida. Should his petition be granted, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee will establish a fund from which he can draw any resources needed for additional health needs not covered by his insurance.

I look forward to your response in this matter.

With sentiments of deepest esteem, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan  
Archbishop of Milwaukee

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