

22 October 2004

Memo To: Father Dan Griffith

From: Father Kevin McDonough

Re: Boundary Concerns with [REDACTED]

Dan, I am sorry for the accelerating rhetoric of our exchange of voice mails and brief conversations. I am writing to clarify my perspective, hoping that we can shed more light on the process. Feel free to share this memo with others if you believe that doing so would be helpful.

First, a preliminary word about our difficulty in finding time to sit down: you noted that I “have a lot on my plate”. That is accurate. Implicit in the comment, however, was that my response and that of the Archdiocese were therefore being unduly delayed or minimized by insufficient time available for the task. Permit me to address that.

As you will see below, I came to the conclusion early in this process that no young people were at risk (see discussion below). Were there any reasonable evidence that young people were at risk, I would have dropped everything else that I had on my calendar in order to institute immediate steps to protect kids.

It was apparent to me, and remains so, that we would need professional investigative resources to clarify the boundary issues in Father [REDACTED] behavior. From the first conversation I had about the questions at All Saints (with a dad-eyewitness on Monday, October 11), each person has indicated that Father [REDACTED] engaged in no illegal touch or speech. That has clearly put this matter – from day one – into a question of the exercise of proper judgment. This is of course a very important question, as you have repeatedly noted. But the correction of judgment-failures requires a careful description of behavior and its effect, an investigative task requiring both time and skills not available to me. I waited on Monday for your written summary of the situation (which I still do not have as of this morning). I spoke then on Tuesday with [REDACTED]. She graciously provided me with her notes. That gave me the information I needed to ask help at the Archdiocese in finding the proper investigative resources. In fact we have found the right person. She will begin her work in the next workday or two.

Given that intervention for criminal or other endangering behavior was not called for, then the other reason for me to have cancelled other matters to intervene personally in the situation would be to attempt to slow down the reaction cycle in order to permit an investigation to move ahead in the parish. To put it crudely, Dan – I would have stepped in if I thought it necessary to prevent the “rush to judgment” that you referred to in your Tuesday call to me. But I had more respect for the people involved than to believe that necessary. With Father [REDACTED] absent this week for retreat, and with the school closed for MEA weekend yesterday and today, I thought I had time to clarify an investigative protocol and share it with everyone.

Permit me to address the question of children at risk. Here are the key points of the analysis:

1. In regard to the behavior at the Marathon: All of Father [REDACTED]'s behavior happened in plain view of other young people and of many adults. No one has suggested even once that he attempted to isolate young people, individually or in small groups.
2. I spoke with the principal at Saint John the Baptist School in Savage. He told me that he could visualize the interaction described in the reports we received, since Father [REDACTED] was frequently with the young people at that parish. He also reported that the behavior did not cause alarm or concern there, among children or adults, and in fact was positively reinforced by people who praised Father [REDACTED] as supportive of the school and its students. (Dan, please note that this does not suggest that this behavior is appropriate at All Saints or even at Saint John's. Rather, it offers good reason to understand the publicly-observed behavior is not – as some at All Saints apparently fear – the tip of some awful psychosexual iceberg, but a previously-reinforced pattern that now must be changed).
3. More troubling to me (and I think to you) is the fact that Father [REDACTED] took a young person from the school to his home for a period of about a half-hour without parental permission. Mitigating this some is the fact that the young person had repeatedly been in the house, but that is not an excuse. Important as this failure of judgment is, however, I am reassured as to the actual safety of young people by the fact that your conversation with the young man and his mother indicates that no improper touch or other behavior actually took place.
4. In my conversation with [REDACTED] on Tuesday and my message to you last Friday, I emphasized that reports about any even-potentially-criminal behavior should be brought immediately to the police. Both [REDACTED] and you affirmed to me that you already knew that that was the case.
5. Finally, as noted above, Father [REDACTED] has not been physically present in the parish during the period of this investigation. My intent is to ask him to stay away from activities involving young people until the professional investigation is concluded.

Dan, I apologize for giving an impression of disrespect for your communications with me – at least, more recent responses from you have given me the sense that I have communicated that to you. I have heard you carefully and we are responding here carefully. I have heard your opinion, and respectfully disagree, that Father [REDACTED] cannot be in the parish until closure is brought to this matter. I do not doubt that there may be people who do not like his being there. There are considerations of justice involved, however, and on balance I do not believe that even temporary removal is called for.

I hope this information is useful to you. I do not expect you to agree, but I do hope I have conveyed the seriousness with which we are trying to address these concerns. Feel free to respond as you choose.