



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS IN TENNESSEE

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August 16, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last month an allegation of racial discrimination was raised against Fr. Jacek Kowal, pastor of the Catholic Church of the Incarnation in Collierville, by two employees of Master Building Service Contractors, a cleaning company that cleaned the church, school and rectory. By letter from their attorney, the employees requested an investigation by the Diocese, though they declined to speak directly with the diocesan investigator. After a thorough investigation, we are certain that the claims of racial bias and discrimination are unfounded, and that Fr. Kowal did nothing wrong. Normally our investigations are not made public. However, these charges were raised in detail to the media, garnering national attention. Thus, in this particular case it is appropriate to respond publicly.

On Friday, May 3, Fr. Kowal was finishing his celebration of morning Mass and getting ready for the annual May crowning celebration. He was approached by members of the parish staff. They told Fr. Kowal that the cleaning company employee who typically cleans his rectory had arrived unannounced that morning to the parish office, and informed the parish staff that she was quitting her employment. She wanted to enter the rectory with her replacement in order to train her. The parish staff had informed the cleaning company employees that Fr. Kowal was at the May crowning, and could not leave the church to come to the rectory and crate his dog, a German Shepherd named Ceaser. The housekeeper indicated that she would be happy to crate the dog without its owner. Being concerned that this might be a danger, two parish staff members left the office and went to the church to ask Fr. Kowal his thoughts. Fr. Kowal told his staff that the women should not enter the rectory and try to place the dog in a crate without him present, as he was concerned that they would be at risk of being bitten. While the current housekeeper had been properly introduced to the dog by Fr. Kowal, he was not able to leave at that time to introduce his dog to the replacement employee. Fr. Kowal's response would have been the same with respect to any new employee or visitor unknown by the dog, regardless of race or ethnicity.

At the time the cleaning company employees came to the office, the parish staff knew that Fr. Kowal's dog was in the rectory outside of his crate. They were aware that the dog was very protective of his home, and there was a risk that the dog would bite a stranger entering the rectory without his owner present. The staff were aware that years ago the dog had been threatened by a person who happened to be African American, causing the dog to be somewhat

I will give you a new heart Ezekiel 36:26

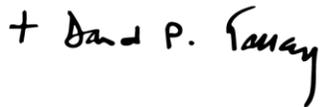
more agitated initially around strangers with darker skin, until the dog gets to know them. The replacement employee who was planning to enter the rectory was an African-American person the dog had never met. A parish staff member told the women that she was concerned about them entering the rectory because “Fr. Jacek’s dog is kinda racist.”

Although the parish staff member’s choice of words was highly unfortunate and imprecise—they were not motivated by racial animus. Rather, the concern by all involved was the safety of these women, one of whom was a stranger to the dog, and they knew that attempting to crate the dog would be dangerous when its owner was not present. Their concern was to prevent the cleaning company employees from being injured. And the parish staff were aware that in 2017 Fr. Kowal had been bitten on the hand by the dog while trying to crate him in an agitated state.

The cleaning company employees interpreted this incident as a pretext by Fr. Kowal, motivated by a desire not to have an African American housekeeper. This is simply not true. In fact, at his previous assignment as pastor, Fr. Kowal employed an African American housekeeper the entire five years he was pastor.

In conclusion, after our thorough investigation, I find these particular allegations of racial discrimination to be unfounded. As bishop, I wish to emphasize that all human persons are created in the image of the one God and enjoy an equal dignity. Therefore, all forms of racial discrimination are sinful and wrong. What occurred at Incarnation, however, simply was not a case of racial discrimination.

In the light and love of the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David P. Talley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Most Reverend David P. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.
Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee