

From the Archbishop,

Dear St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parishioners,

Early this month, the Archdiocese received an allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor from the 1980s against Fr. Don Cleary. Fr. Cleary was pastor of St. Mary's in Wayne from 1986-1988. This matter was immediately reported to the Wayne County attorney. The county attorney informed the Archdiocese that we could begin an internal investigation, as the statute of limitations had expired. In that investigation, Fr. Cleary did not contest the allegation. As a result, he has been permanently suspended from public ministry and is no longer in residence at St. Elizabeth Ann Parish. Prior to this month, the Archdiocese had never received an allegation of misconduct against Fr. Cleary.

The Archdiocese of Omaha remains committed to the protection of young people and vulnerable adults, the prevention of abuse, healing for victims of abuse and cooperating with civil authorities. Anyone concerned about the actions of a member of the clergy or any church worker should contact law enforcement.

Archbishop George Lucas

Oct. 28, 2018

Thoughts from the pastor,

This letter is very painful for me to write for several reasons. The first is that you are going through this again. The second is that it is about a person that has been such a blessing to so many of you. Third is that it involves yet another victim of abuse that we need to pray for as we deal with the barrage of revelations of clergy scandals from the past fifty years.

As you read this, some of you have already heard that Fr. Don Cleary has had a credible accusation brought against him of an inappropriate relationship with a minor. It is an instance similar to what you dealt with seven years ago when Fr. Frank Dvorak was in a similar situation. This case was also from years in the past. It was back when he was pastor out in St. Mary's in Wayne, NE, about thirty years ago. The accusation was brought to the attention of the Archbishop and Fr. Scott Hastings three weeks ago, which was the day I got back from being gone for my trip and retreat. The timing was good in many ways because it was an opportunity for them to work with the proper civil authorities to start the investigation and see if it was credible. I was simply asked to explain that Fr. Don was taking time off

after I had taken my time off. This gave the authorities time to investigate and not wreck Fr. Don's character unnecessarily.

Fr. Don did take time to be with relatives and I have been covering all of his Masses for the last three weeks. The investigation is not over but the initial accusation was not contested by Fr. Don and has been shown to be true so the Archbishop has relieved Fr. Don of all priestly duties. At this time it looks like he might end up in the same situation that Fr. Frank Dvorak is in. He would go into full retirement and spend the rest of his life praying for victims of abuse. Again, this is a probability because now the investigation will be opened to the public for the purpose of giving any other possible victims to come forward. With Fr. Frank there were never any others and there might not be any for Fr. Don either, but neither the civil nor the church authorities can take that for granted.

This information is going out to SJS school parents and all the parishes that Fr. Don has served during his priesthood. I know nothing about the victim, which is how it should be. That person has been living with this for years, probably afraid to come forward. To be brought into the public spotlight now would just add to the hurt. So no information about that will be shared. Fr. Don has been very cooperative and is obviously in pain right now. He knows how bad this is and has tried to make up for it by years of appropriate service to the church. He is still with relatives and is currently waiting for an opening at the priest's retirement apartments so he can move his things out of SEAS rectory.

For the immediate future I will be handling all the Masses as I have been doing for the last three weeks. The Archbishop is in the process of setting up a time when he can meet with Fr. Tom Weisbecker of SJ, Fr. Scott Hastings, and me to discuss what will can happen to keep the parishes balanced for the sake of the school. If either parish weakens, the school suffers. If SEAS ends up with seven or eight less Masses per week this could happen. So the plan is to look at SJ sharing their associate pastor with SEAS. Each parish would then have to figure out a way to drop four Masses and have all the Masses coordinated to provide the most convenient times between the two parishes.

This weekend is actually Priesthood Sunday. Because I was originally scheduled to work on an Engaged Encounter Weekend, we will celebrate it next weekend in conjunction with the Vocation's Committee sponsoring Donut Sunday. That is also providential in that it gives all of us time to breathe and take all of this in. As I mentioned, I know that this is painful for so many of you because of how much of a blessing Fr. Don has been to this parish for the last three years. I hope and pray that you will be able to be a support to him over the next years; just like you have been to Fr. Dvorak and some of the other priests, who have served here, that have shown their weaknesses. Our job as a parish is to help people to get to heaven. These are opportunities for that work to continue.

As I mentioned last week, Sister Irene is selling religious articles in the narthex of the church to help fund her religious order's work to help rescue women and children from prostitution and human trafficking. Next weekend the second collection will be for disaster relief for 2018 to help victims of the hurricanes, etc. This is being done at the request of the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. The following weekend, 11/10-11, the second collection will be for the food pantries sponsored by Catholic Charities. The collection is called "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation" and helps out three food pantries in the Omaha area.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank