

Banned from public, Gumbleton speaks privately

Dennis Sadowski | Catholic News Service | Oct. 14, 2009

Despite being asked by the bishop of Marquette, Mich., not to visit the diocese, retired Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit met privately with a group of peace advocates and later with survivors of clergy sexual abuse in the northern Michigan town.

Bishop Alexander K. Sample of Marquette said that, because Bishop Gumbleton did not follow church protocol in seeking approval to speak and because the retired prelate's views on homosexuality and the ordination of women to the priesthood were in opposition to church teaching, he could not speak in a public forum in the diocese.

Bishop Sample notified Bishop Gumbleton of his decision only after learning Oct. 2 that the retired prelate was scheduled to be in the diocese Oct. 11-12, according to Loreene Zeno Koskey, diocesan director of communications, who spoke to Catholic News Service Oct. 13.

Originally, Bishop Gumbleton was scheduled to speak about peace at an unnamed church Oct. 11 and then address Marquette Citizens for Peace and Justice on nuclear disarmament the evening of Oct. 12. Instead, both events were canceled.

At a hastily scheduled reception, Bishop Gumbleton met informally with members of the peace group at a private residence Oct. 11.

Bishop Gumbleton said he also met with clergy sexual abuse victims the afternoon of Oct. 12. In 2006, he publicly stated he had been abused by a priest as a teenage seminarian.

He told CNS Oct. 13 that he and Bishop Sample "worked it out" so he could meet with the Marquette peace group.

"Actually everything has calmed down a whole lot," Bishop Gumbleton said. "I actually think we made some good progress."

However, Koskey explained, there was "no mutual understanding."

"He (Bishop Sample) still did not want him to come," she told CNS.

In an Oct. 9 statement, Bishop Sample said that, in his position as "chief shepherd and teacher of the Catholic faithful in the Upper Peninsula (of Michigan)," he is charged with "the grave responsibility to keep clearly before my people the teachings of the Catholic Church on matters of faith and morals."

"Given Bishop Gumbleton's very public position on certain important matters of Catholic teaching, specifically with regard to homosexuality and the ordination of women to the priesthood, it was my judgment that his presence in Marquette would not be helpful to me in fulfilling my responsibility."

Bishop Sample also said his decision to ask his fellow prelate not to appear in Marquette "had absolutely nothing to do with the group who invited him to speak ... nor with the topic of his publicized speech."

"I am sorry for the negative impact this has had on those planning the event," he said.

Bishop Gumbleton told CNS he was surprised by Bishop Sample's stance.

"I didn't do it to flaunt him or anything," Bishop Gumbleton said. "I simply felt this (Michigan) was my home and I didn't think I had to (seek permission)."

The outspoken advocate of nuclear disarmament said he often seeks the permission of a local bishop when he is invited to speak.

"But when I'm in Michigan, my home, I didn't feel it was necessary because I've talked in all the dioceses many times. I know all the bishops in Michigan," he said.

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