News



by Sarah Salvadore

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Bishop Timothy Doherty of Lafayette, Indiana, has suspended a pastor after the priest called Black Lives Matter protestors "maggots" and "parasites."

Fr. Theodore Rothrock, pastor of St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church in Carmel, wrote a weekly bulletin message June 28 where he called the protestors "wolves in wolves clothing, masked thieves and bandits, seeking only to devour the life of the poor and profit from the fear of others."

"They are maggots and parasites at best, feeding off the isolation of addiction and broken families, and offering to replace any current frustration and anxiety with more misery and greater resentment," said Rothrock.

The letter, posted online, was taken down June 30 after it was met with criticism. A newly formed group, Carmel Against Racial Injustice, released a statement after the publication of Rothrock's comments. The group said they were "shocked" and "disgusted" by the letter.

"We are also deeply saddened by the fact that the church leadership did not condemn the statement and saw fit to allow its publication. Silence is the action of being complicit in injustice," said the statement.

The group called for a peaceful witness outside the church in the Indianapolis suburb July 5.

"We are calling upon parishioners of the church, members of the community, and other religious leaders to denounce these statements and join us in active protest of this position. We cannot stand idly by and allow a leader of a church that serves 6,000 Carmel families to pass off hateful and racist rhetoric as gospel," said the group.

On July 1, the Diocese of Lafayette released an official statement announcing the suspension of Rothrock from public ministry.

"The Bishop expresses pastoral concern for the affected communities. The suspension offers the Bishop an opportunity for pastoral discernment for the good of the diocese and for the good of Father Rothrock," read the statement.

Rothrock was due to move to a new parish next month, but that appointment is now on hold.

"Various possibilities for his public continuation in priestly ministry are being considered, but he will no longer be assigned as Pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel," said the statement from the diocese.

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Before the suspension, Doherty had on June 30 asked Rothrock to issue an explanation.

"I neither approved nor previewed that article," said Doherty. "Pastors do not submit bulletin articles or homilies to my offices before they are delivered. I expect Father Rothrock to issue a clarification about his intended message. I have not known him to depart from Church teaching in matters of doctrine and social justice."

Rothrock then released a statement on the parish website, apologizing for his earlier comments. He said he was surprised that his letter received "extensive coverage and has aroused such interest and debate."

"It was not my intention to offend anyone, and I am sorry that my words have caused any hurt to anyone," he wrote.

He said "racial and ethnic bigotries are evils" that have been condemned by the church and that "they have never been tolerated by me, and never will be."

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