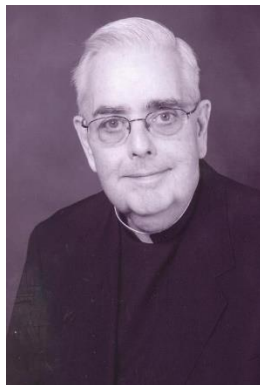


Sebastian Wuepper

Fr. Thomas Gannon, S.J.



*Figure 1 - Thomas M. Gannon, from [https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/thomas-gannon-
obituary?pid=178729083](https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/thomas-gannon-
obituary?pid=178729083)*

At Loyola University Chicago from the late 1960s to 1983, lived in the Jesuit residence and served as chair of the department of sociology from the mid-1970s to 1983. He was transferred to Georgetown University in 1983, while remaining listed at Loyola as professor of sociology and anthropology until 1985 and was subsequently listed as professor of sociology with the department of sociology until 1987. Gannon was accused of child abuse in at least six cases across the Midwest, including during his time at Loyola University Chicago. The legal status of cases is unknown as of March 2022. Gannon died in 2011.

Thomas Michael Gannon was a Chicago native, born in the Windy City in 1936. He grew up in a strongly catholic household, and attended the De La Salle Institute high school, a Catholic school run by the De La Salle Brothers religious order. Gannon graduated from De La Salle in 1952.¹ The young man then joined the Society of Jesus at the age of eighteen in 1954. During his career, he was assigned to various institutions of

¹ “10 CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS AWARD 1,057 DIPLOMAS: Mercy, with 214, Numbers Largest Class.,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, June 14, 1942, sec. S. – This article has been misfiled by a decade.

Sebastian Wuepper

secondary and post-secondary education that the Jesuit order managed. His first assignment while he was still a seminarian was as a high-school level instructor at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, a northern suburb of Chicago, in the early 1960s. After Loyola Academy, Gannon was sent to Cleveland, where he taught at St. Ignatius High School on the city's West Side. Then he returned to his home town, working as a lecturer at Loyola University Chicago's sociology department and worked as clinic staff at the Illinois Youth commission, while engaging in theological studies preparing for his ordination into priesthood, which he underwent in 1967.² As an ordained Jesuit priest, Gannon remained with Loyola University Chicago's department of sociology, where he was officially named chairman in 1972. This was also the first date that the university's own course books listed him as a regular faculty member.³ Gannon stayed with Loyola's department of sociology for eleven more years, during which time he became an engaged teacher, a prolific author and well-regarded scholar of his field.

By the time he joined the ranks of Loyola's established academics, Gannon had already abused students at St. Ignatius High School. When the Jesuit order became aware of this is not entirely clear. Both the Church and order hierarchies tend to not enter deliberations about issues like these into even their internal archival records, as the former archivist of the Archdiocese of Boston James O'Toole has pointed out.⁴ The documents the Society of Jesus released that cover Gannon's career are not conclusive as to when his assignment at the Cleveland high school ended. The document covering his assignment history reveals that he was posted at St. Ignatius from 1962 to 1964,

² "Ordination Planned for 3 Jesuits," *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, June 8, 1967, sec. SECTION 3A.

³ "Loyola University Appoints Dean, 2 Aides, Chairmen," *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, July 23, 1972, sec. North.

⁴ James M. O'Toole, "What Did I Know, and When Did I Know It?," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 2 (2016): 5.

Sebastian Wuepper

before leaving for theological studies.⁵ The Anderson Report—a relatively comprehensive document compiled by the St. Paul, Minnesota law firm Jeff Anderson & Associates, that lists all clergy members by state accused of child sexual abuse—does not list any of his assignments before his ordination as a priest in 1967.⁶ However, Gannon’s entry on the 2020 list of the Jesuits with credible sexual abuse allegations denotes that he first abused minors at St. Ignatius High School between 1961 to 1966.⁷ Altogether, the 2020 *USA Midwest Province Jesuits* document—a report compiled by the Society of Jesus’ Midwest Province listing all Jesuit priests that the order deems have been credibly accused of child sexual abuse—lists six different abusive episodes of Thomas Gannon in six different locations.

The second reported episode of abuse in Gannon’s life occurred in St. Jerome parish in Chicago’s Rogers Park neighborhood between 1970 and 1971. The details of this case are not in the public record and thus remain unclear. Gannon was at this time coming into his own at Loyola University. He had attained the status of an important and well-respected professor at the department of sociology. Soon after he rose to the rank of department chairman. As a professor and soon after as chairman of the department of sociology, he frequently acted as advisor to graduate students in the

⁵ The Society of Jesus - USA Midwest Province, “USA Midwest Province Jesuits with an Established Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor Assignment List” (The Society of Jesus, December 21, 2018), 20, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/order_lists/Jesuits_Midwest/2018_12_21_Jesuits_Midwest_Established_Allegations_Assignment_List.pdf.

⁶ Jeff Anderson & Associates PA, “The Anderson Report - Child Sexual Abuse in the Archdiocese and Dioceses in Illinois” (AndersonAdvocates.com, December 2019), 145, <https://www.andersonadvocates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Child-Sexual-Abuse-in-the-Archdiocese-and-dioceses-in-Illinois.pdf>.

⁷ The Society of Jesus - USA Midwest Province, “USA Midwest Province Jesuits with an Established Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor” (The Society of Jesus, February 21, 2020), 4, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/order_lists/Jesuits_Midwest/2020_02_21_Jesuits_Midwest_Established_Allegation_s.pdf.

Sebastian Wuepper

program. In the 1970s two of his advisees informed the Jesuits at Loyola that Father Gannon had sexually molested and assaulted them. The administration dismissed the allegations, Gannon remained in his position with the department of sociology, and the aggrieved students left the university.⁸ An important element in abuse cases like Gannon's was that the abusers were aware that they were ultimately shielded from consequences. Gannon's superior at Loyola stood by the priest, given that the man was both a lauded sociologist and a well-regarded member of Chicago's Jesuit Province.⁹ Had Loyola's Jesuit administration acted differently in this case, Gannon would likely not have been able to go on and abuse—as far as is known today—at least three more minors. But the Jesuit community and Loyola University Chicago would then also have likely faced a scandalous revelation of a child molester Jesuit priest outed to the public.

He found his next victims at a St. James Church parish in Gary, Indiana while working there as a minister. As before, the details of the case are not available on public record. In the same year, Gannon received the distinction of Faculty Member of the Year from Loyola University Chicago's Faculty Council.¹⁰ Loyola's undergraduate coursebook for the 1983-1985 academic session lists Gannon as an active professor of sociology-anthropology, still giving classes.¹¹ However, Gannon was transferred to the Woodstock Theology Center at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. later in 1983. From interviews which reporters of Georgetown University's student-run newspaper *the Hoya*

⁸ "Gannon Abused Minors, Adults Across 3 Institutions; Later Taught Sociology at GU," March 15, 2019, <https://thehoya.com/gannon-abused-minors-adults-across-3-institutions-later-taught-sociology-gu/>.

⁹ "Gannon Abused Minors, Adults Across 3 Institutions; Later Taught Sociology at GU."

¹⁰ FACULTY COUNCIL · 1032 W. Sheridan Road et al., "Faculty Member of the Year Recipients: Faculty Council: Loyola University Chicago," accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.luc.edu/faccouncil/committees/awards/fmoty.shtml>.

¹¹ Loyola University Chicago, "Undergraduate Studies Course Catalog, 1983-1985," 1983, 207, https://luc.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_354b6e37-5d0b-4755-9126-0646b53e5b9f/.

Sebastian Wuepper

conducted with victims of Gannon, Loyola's administration was well aware of his abuse of students and minors. In this case, the Jesuit administrators of Loyola behaved similar to many other member of the church hierarchy, who after the case of a sexually abusive priest became known to them, essentially proceeded to shuffle the offending priests through the parishes, as historian John Seitz found.¹² In Gannon's case, this shuffling around involved institutions of higher education as well as church parishes. Gannon then later in the early 1990s published several books on the people and the economy of northwest Indiana, the same geographical region where he was accused of engaging in child sexual abuse.¹³ Had Loyola's administration acted differently in this instance, Thomas Gannon series of sexual abuse of minors would have ended in 1983.

Whether or not the transfer from Loyola University Chicago to Georgetown was in fact directly caused by the Jesuits at Loyola becoming aware of the incident in Gary is not clear. The chronological closeness of the Gary case and Gannon's reassignment combined with him still being listed in the undergraduate course books for the upcoming academic session could indicate a hasty transferring out of a problematic priest. In this the Loyola superiors would have behaved like so many other bishops and religious order leaders did at the time when it came to sexual abusers: rather than incurring scandal, they would just transfer the perpetrators to other parishes or provinces, enabling further abuse and dodging the (immediate) incurring of scandal for

¹² John C. Seitz, "The Lives of Priests," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 2 (2016): 20.

¹³ Thomas M Gannon, *The People of Northwest Indiana: Demographic Changes and Challenges, 1970-1990* (East Chicago, IN: Heartland Center, 1992).

Sebastian Wuepper

themselves and the institutions they served. However, the reason for Gannon's reassignment at this juncture is not clear from the records publicly available.¹⁴

After five years at Georgetown, Gannon returned to Chicago in 1989. There, he again engaged in ministry as well as in further sociological scholarship. He published two more books and wrote several articles for the Jesuit Heartland Institute in East Chicago, Indiana. The Jesuit report on abusive priests lists that he then again was credibly accused of committing an act of sexual abuse with a minor at Chicago's Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish in 1993. At the time he was also working as a teacher at Our Lady of the Gardens Catholic Pre-K and Elementary school on Chicago's Far South Side. Shortly after the incident, Gannon was again re-assigned, but stayed within Chicago.

Five years later, while working as a minister at Holy Family Church on the Near West Side, Gannon abused another minor. Following this incident, he was again reassigned, this time to Milford Spiritual Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. What his position at this Jesuit spiritual retreat was, whether he was transferred there to be a manager or to partake in a personal, spiritual retreat, is not clear from the records. Again, the closeness to the abuse case could indicate that this reassignment was caused by his superiors being informed about his transgression. Removing problematic priests to spiritual retreats where they would then engage in penance and meditate on their sins was a widespread reaction by ranking clergy member towards sexually abusive priests, as the landmark case of John Geoghan in Boston in 2002 demonstrated.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jo Renee Formicola, *Clerical Sexual Abuse: How the Crisis Changed US Catholic Church-State Relations*, First edition., Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 48.

¹⁵ Michael D'Antonio, *Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime, and the Era of Catholic Scandal*, 1st ed. (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, StMartin's Press, 2013), 251.

This 1998 incident was so far the last recorded credible accusation of child sexual abuse towards Thomas Gannon as of 2022. Like many cases of clerical sexual abuse of minors, the full extent of abusive behavior is only slowly revealed as more survivors speak out, often years and even decades after the perpetrators themselves died. The *USA Midwest Province Jesuits with an Established Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor Assignment List* published in 2018 recorded Thomas M. Gannon having had been credibly accused of four distinct phases of sexual abuse of minors.¹⁶ Two years later, the Jesuits published a new list, in which Gannon's record had two further phases of abuse added, demonstrating that these cases may be in the past, but they are by no means fully closed. It is unclear how many individuals Gannon is credibly accused of abusing.

Thomas Gannon returned from the Milford Spiritual Center to Chicago in 2004, where in his retirement he spent several years working on applied sociological projects furthering peace and social justice. In 2009 he moved to the Colombiere Center spiritual retreat in Michigan, where he passed away in 2011.¹⁷

¹⁶ The Society of Jesus - USA Midwest Province, "USA Midwest Province Jesuits with an Established Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor Assignment List," 4.

¹⁷ "Rev. Thomas M. Gannon Obituary (2011) Chicago Tribune," Legacy.com, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/chicagotribune/name/thomas-gannon-obituary?id=2622810>.