

# **Bishop Tobin says he asked Rep. Kennedy privately not to receive Communion**

PROVIDENCE, R.I. - The bishop of Providence said he was “disappointed and really surprised” Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., made public a letter he wrote to the congressman almost three years ago about his practice of the Catholic faith and reception of Communion.

“This comes almost two weeks after the congressman indicated to local media that he would no longer comment publicly on his faith or his relationship with the Catholic Church. The congressman’s public comments require me to reply,” Bishop Thomas J. Tobin said in a Nov. 22 statement.

His remarks came after Kennedy told The Providence Journal daily newspaper that Bishop Tobin “instructed me not to take Communion and said that he has instructed the diocesan priests not to give me Communion.”

The newspaper said Kennedy declined to give details on when or how the bishop issued such an instruction.

Bishop Tobin said that in a February 2007 letter to Kennedy he stated: “In light of the church’s clear teaching, and your consistent actions, therefore, I believe it is inappropriate for you to be receiving holy Communion and I now ask respectfully that you refrain from doing so.”

Kennedy supports keeping abortion legal.

Bishop Tobin said he told the congressman he was writing to him “personally and confidentially as a pastor addressing a member of his flock” and had no intention of making the matter public.

What prompted the letter, he said, was a statement approved by the U.S. bishops in late 2006 that outlined the preparation needed to receive Communion worthily and

said serious sin is a bar to receiving the Eucharist.

Titled “‘Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper’: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist,” the document says that a Catholic who “knowingly and obstinately” rejects “the defined doctrines of the church” or repudiates “her definitive teaching on moral issues” would not be in communion with the church and therefore should not receive Communion.

In his 2007 letter, Bishop Tobin said, he offered to meet with the congressman to discuss the situation.

In a response at the time, Kennedy told the bishop he had the “utmost respect for the work you do on behalf of the Catholic community in Rhode Island.”

“I understand your pastoral advice was confidential in nature and given with the best intentions for my personal spiritual welfare,” he said.

In his Nov. 22 statement, Bishop Tobin said he was disappointed Kennedy “would make public my pastoral and confidential request of nearly three years ago that sought to provide solely for his spiritual well-being.”

He said he did not want to continue public discussion on Kennedy’s faith life but “will absolutely respond publicly and strongly whenever he attacks the Catholic Church, misrepresents the teachings of the church or issues inaccurate statements about my pastoral ministry.”

Bishop Tobin said his door is always open to Kennedy to discuss such matters with him and he will “continue to pray – sincerely and fervently – for his conversion and repentance, and for his personal and spiritual well-being.”

The exchange of comments between Bishop Tobin and Kennedy began when Kennedy criticized the U.S. bishops in October for threatening to oppose health care reform unless the legislation banned the use of federal funds to cover abortion.

In an Oct. 22 interview, Kennedy said their stance was “fanning the flames of dissent and discord.”

Bishop Tobin asked for an apology from Kennedy at the time and requested a meeting, which was eventually scheduled for Nov. 12 but later postponed.

In an Oct. 29 letter Kennedy sent to the bishop, he stated: "The fact that I disagree with the hierarchy of the church on some issues does not make me any less of a Catholic."

In a column in The Rhode Island Catholic, his diocesan newspaper, Bishop Tobin asked if as a Catholic, Kennedy really understands what it means "to be a Catholic" and question if he could describe himself as Catholic since his stance on abortion was "unacceptable to the church" and "scandalous to many of our members."