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Church Finds Case Against Priest Not Proven—Restrictions Continued

A Catholic Church appeal court has determined that the complaints of sexual abuse against Fr. Thomas Lee did not rise to the level of a canonical crime. In 2008 a court of first instance determined the reports of abuse against Fr. Lee, stemming from the early 1980s, did not rise to the level of a canonical crime and were not proven. An appeal of that decision by the Diocese of Portland was made in September of 2008 in order to be certain each piece of evidence was properly presented.

The appeal court confirmed the decision of the first tribunal* and also agreed with that court that Fr. Lee acted imprudently with minors. Based on that conduct, and circumstances surrounding this case, Bishop Richard Malone has decided to continue restrictions namely, Fr. Lee will not be allowed any regular public ministry in the Church. Any possible exceptions will be evaluated by the bishop on a case-by-case basis.

83 year old Fr. Lee has been out of ministry since September of 2003.

*Information about Church tribunal decisions: A Church tribunal (in this case, made up of three canon lawyers from outside the Portland Diocese) does not presume innocence or guilt of a person accused of a canonical crime; rather, the accused party is presumed neither innocent nor guilty and the evidence determines the outcome of the case which is always proven or not proven.

[Background:

Father Lee was ordained in 1953 and served:

St. Martin of Tours, Millinocket 1953-55

Chaplain, Mercy Hospital, and Maine Medical Center, Portland; Boys' Training Center, Men's Correctional Center 1955-71

Our Lady Queen of Peace, Boothbay Harbor 1971-85

St. Philip Parish, Lyman 1985-2003]
