

1/7/09

Dear Editor,

I am writing to correct statements printed in a Letter to the Editor on January 1, 2009 regarding Thomas Lee, former pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace, Boothbay Harbor (1971-1985). While I believe the writer was well intentioned, it's important to correct inaccuracies that lead to erroneous impressions.

First, the letter mentions "both claims" and "both cases" which sounds like there were only two claims. I have stated before that there were more than two claims. I was not able to say exactly how many claims had been received because the investigation of those claims had been conducted by others, and the investigations are done confidentially out of respect for all concerned. Today, I am able to say that the Diocese of Portland received nine direct and two second-hand reports relating to events involving a total of fourteen individuals, all from the Boothbay Harbor area. The reports involved issues of inappropriate touching or privacy violations. We received no reports of abuse from Lyman, where Thomas Lee ministered from 1985-2003.

This information is being provided in this instance to give the community perspective on the case and to support complainants who made reports on their own or as a result of our encouragement. The initial news report by the Boothbay Register stated that the tribunal was only responding to claims by Marie Tupper and her son. This was never stated or implied by the bishop. It has been reported to us that this inaccuracy has caused some in the community to ridicule and criticize the Tupper family, causing great pain. Those who report sexual abuse claims deserve better treatment.

Second, it is correct that the tribunal found the case was unproven. That does not mean a person is found innocent, not responsible or not culpable as the writer stated. Rather, it means the claims and case as presented to the tribunal did not convince them that Lee's actions rose to the level of sexual abuse. The tribunal did say, as reported earlier, that Lee's actions with children were imprudent.

I agree with the writer's criticism of the remark by Mr. Clohessy of SNAP who said the bishop's action "is a clear admission of guilt." Clohessy's statement is inaccurate. The bishop can't make an admission of guilt for someone else and was not attempting to decide the case himself. He can however, support an appeal to be certain each piece of evidence was properly presented—indeed, that justice is served.

Finally, the bishop's support of an appeal of the tribunal's decision is not against Church law and is an option that is open to him. The Vatican will decide whether to grant an appeal. While the bishop's motivations may be hard for some to understand, in a previous statement he explained he was not satisfied with the process. Keep in mind the bishop took time to carefully consider his decision.

I applaud the writer's challenge to find compassion and to love everyone involved in this case: most especially those who have made reports, also the accused and all faithful parishioners. We must now allow our justice system to come to a final conclusion and have faith that Bishop Malone has the best interest of the Diocese at heart.

Sue Bernard  
Communications Director  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland