

For Immediate Release
12/19/08

For more information contact:
Sue Bernard, Communications Director
Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland
773-6471

Decision Appealed in Sexual Abuse Case

Bishop Richard J. Malone is supporting an appeal to the Vatican of the decision by a church court (tribunal) of 81 year old Thomas Lee, a priest who has been out of ministry since September of 2003. A tribunal (comprised of three priests from outside the Diocese of Portland who have special expertise in the area of Church law) determined the accusations against Lee regarding sexual abuse of minors were not proven. The tribunal acknowledged that his actions, which took place in the early 1980's, were imprudent.

Bishop Joseph Gerry had forwarded the case to the Vatican in March of 2004 and requested a trial by a church court. In 2006, the Vatican authorized the establishment of a tribunal in Portland. Testimony was presented during 2007 and the tribunal informed the bishop of its decision in August of this year. Bishop Malone made his request for an appeal in September.

“While I respect the work of the tribunal, I support an appeal in this case because I want to be certain each piece of evidence was properly presented,” explained the bishop. “I am stunned and disappointed at the outcome of this case and frustrated that the process has taken so long. It has undoubtedly been difficult for the families involved.”

“We do not know how long the Vatican will take to rule on the request. Therefore, in the interest of openness, the unusual amount of time involved and to answer questions from victim advocates, I'm informing you of the status of the case before it is completed.”

Father Lee remains out of ministry until the case is resolved.

This was the first case of a priest charged with sexual abuse of minors to be adjudicated by a tribunal in the Diocese.

*[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. Mary's Parish, Bath 1977-85
St. Philip Parish, Lyman 1985-2003]*
