

Bishop remains in denial over church scandal

Letters, The Stamford Advocate (CT), December 8, 2006

To the editor:

The Dec. 5 edition of The Advocate contained an interesting mix of articles concerning the horrible scandal within the Roman Catholic Church, the Diocese of Bridgeport and the parish of St. John Church in Darien. The "audience" that Bishop Lori and diocesan Finance Director Norm Walker had with the editorial board received front page coverage, but came to no conclusion.

The bishop continues to deny responsibility for the actions of one of his own priests, the Rev. Michael Jude Fay, former pastor of St. John's. He does not credit a good man, the Rev. Michael Madden, associate pastor, for "blowing the whistle," by which Madden's own priestly vocation and spiritual service to the good and generous members of the parish were lost - at a time when the church cannot afford to lose any ordained priests. And he shifts the problem onto the suffering shoulders of the laity.

Although Walker indicated that "the diocese knew that St. John's was about nine months behind in its monthly payments" (called the "cathedraticum," interpreted as the "tax for the cathedral") and blamed "staffing shortages" for the lack of oversight, the bishop added that "we could have saved a lot of money" - \$1.4 million, unknown and/or unrecovered, certainly not returned to the people of the parish of St. John - if people within the parish who knew what was going on had come forward sooner. It sounds to me like "blame the laity"! Also, didn't Father Madden come forward some six months prior to the first release of information about the disaster, but was ignored?

The edition coincidentally contained a very healthy summary of events in a letter from Tom Gallagher of Greenwich ("Parishioners not exempt from church scandal"). Also, Page 3 displayed a very attractive ad for the next meeting of the forward-looking, well-intentioned group of believers - Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport. Since the clerical sexual abuse scandal was revealed in Boston five years ago, this grass-roots movement to "keep the faith and change the church" has been meeting on the first Thursday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the welcoming confines of First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk. Those meetings would be on diocesan property had not Bishop Lori denied access by reason of some vague "hidden agenda" he said was espoused by the group.

Unlike the lack of financial transparency and openness with the diocesan records, complete information is available to all on the Web site www.votfbpt.org or by calling the regional coordinator in Norwalk at 956-7476. Our mission is simply to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the spirit, through which the faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.

Thank you for your excellent coverage of this important matter.

Jim Alvord, Norwalk

(The writer is regional coordinator of Voice of the Faithful in Norwalk.)