

Criticism of bishop unwarranted, unfair

As an active member of the Diocese of Bridgeport and one of the individuals recruited three years ago by Bishop William E. Lori, I take umbrage with the rather blatant inaccuracies in John Marshal Lee's letter regarding laity having a large say in this diocese.

I spent more than 36 years in the private sectors in 11 different and varied industries, dominated by a 27-year career at General Electric. I now have responsibility for Catholic Charities across Fairfield County, the largest private social service organization in the county. We serve the needy and vulnerable of all faiths through more than 25 programs including the Thomas Merton House here in Bridgeport, the state's largest soup kitchen.

From a business management standpoint, Bishop Lori compares very favorably with another rather well respected business leader who I have had plenty of experience with, Jack Welch. The bishop is smart, savvy, thoughtful, hard working and has done an exceptional job re-engineering this diocese. Well beyond that though, he is extremely compassionate and a truly outstanding spiritual leader.

Most relevant to me in writing to the *Connecticut Post* and its readers, however, is that the bishop has aggressively addressed each and every suggestion that Lee makes "in the interest of a greener environment in the diocese." He has done this work in an open and extremely transparent way. The bishop, the chancellor, and Chief Financial Officer Norm Walker have walked the walk on these issues. They have tirelessly explained the sea of changes that have been and continue to be implemented in every nook and cranny of the diocese. They have met with the press, made themselves available in parishes, and written volumes about what we are doing for public consumption.

Finally, I must address the totally inaccurate and misleading statements about the sale of our nursing homes. I was very close to this transaction as my 92-year-old mother is a resident at St. Camillus in Stamford and I am on the board. This transaction was crafted and implemented in the best interests of everyone involved...residents, families, employees, and the more than 400,000 Catholics of the diocese who expect their bishop to be financially responsible and a caring shepherd. The Catholicity Covenants were structured so that successor companies to Harborside Healthcare must assume them as they are attached to a land lease held by the diocese. As has been stated publicly, the proceeds from the sale were used to discharge the debt tied to the homes and any remaining dollars are being used to provide for the going forward spiritual needs of residents, a continuing responsibility of the diocese. The price used by Lee in his letter, \$345 million, included the entire Harborside business, a network of more than 70 elder care and rehabilitation facilities across the country. Apples and tomatoes, to say the least.

Finally, Lee was not identified as an active member of the Voice of the Faithful, a small group of dissident Roman Catholics who are seeking church reform that is quite inconsistent with the desires of a great majority of practicing Catholics.

We still have much to do to fully achieve the goals of this bishop related to financial control and total transparency. Clearly, the involvement of the laity under Bishop Lori in this and many other efforts is consequential and growing. The recently announced pastoral plan is a 5-year effort aimed quite clearly at increased involvement by the laity at each and every one of our 87 parishes. We have come a very long way and I'm extremely proud of this bishop, his team, and our diocese.

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