

2825 Ridgeway Row / La Jolla, California 92037

Good Friday
April 3, 2015
Abbot John Klassen
St. John's Abbey
Collegeville, MN 56321

Abbot John:

It is with a heavy heart I write this letter to you and the community.

I write as a friend and advocate of Ben Spanier and his parents. Ben spoke with me periodically since 1994. He first reported his sexual abuse at the hands of a St. John's monk to my brother and his wife with whom he was living at the time. They promptly reported the situation to Abbot Timothy. When they were dismissed and discounted they appealed to me since I was serving as chair of the board of ISTI at the time. Timothy took a similar dismissive stance with me about the abuse and said, "Father Thomas (Andert) may have a slight problem with alcohol".

Eric and Margie, Ben's parents, are in contact with me currently. They spoke with me already in 1996 about Ben's abuse and his reactions and struggles with it and the "disrespectful and demeaning" (condescending) way Timothy treated them. They are still hurt and angry about the response of St. John's. Eric told me yesterday that there has always been sufficient cause to file a legal case against the abbey. Ben always resisted that course of action. His suicide again brings into sharp focus not just the sadness of one man and his family, but the long-standing sexual problem infesting too large a proportion of the monastic community.

This letter is written with benefit of my time, experience and association with St. John's. I entered Prep School in 1946; the abbey in 1952; graduated from the college in 1955; ordained in 1959. I was an active member of the community (Personnel Director 1967-70) until I was dispensed in November 1970. Subsequent to that my association continued: i.e. with a 5-year colloquium at the Ecumenical Center (1974-79); helped organize the second national conference of victims of clergy sexual abuse at Collegeville (1994); elected to serve as chair of the board of ISTI (1994-96); taught a month-long seminar on religious celibacy at the SJU seminary-school of theology (Jan. 1996).

Because of these experiences some members of the community reported to me their sexual harassment by other members of the abbey. At their request I reported their concerns to Abbot Timothy.

In addition, I was contacted and interviewed victims who were abused by major superiors:

- Abbot John Eidenschink had a custom of sexual intimacy and abuse with young community members. I had contact with five who left the community. There is reason to believe that some of his victims continued as members of the Abbey.

- Fr. Cosmas Dahlheimer's minor victims from parishes were part of litigation and I was asked to interview several of them. Part of the modus operandi they described (sucking on earlobes) was identical to incidents with clerics whom he kissed on the lips and sucked their ears.
- Fr. Richard Eckroth's child victims from the parish were multiple; and I interviewed several who described horrendous treatment. In my estimation he is a very sick man.
- A few years ago (2011) a man from St. Anselm's parish in NY contacted me and reported that Timothy Kelly abused him and at least 3 other high school students during counseling sessions. As personnel director I had visited NY in 1970 when Timothy was on the staff and recognized the layout that the victim described. I interviewed him at length via telephone and met with him face to face. He presented himself and the facts as credible.
- When some of the mediation sessions for victims of monks abuse were held in Minneapolis I was interviewed about allegations against Br. Isaac Connolly. I had interviewed one of his victims.
- Unfortunately there are other contacts I will not name.

It is with tremendous sadness that I have to review these facts. St. John's was my home, and I recognize my personal debt to many good dedicated men who continue to inspire me.

It is no secret that St. John's has a sexual problem. There are important questions that have not been addressed by the community.

1. The problem at St. John's is clearly systematic. At a minimum, ten percent of the community has credibly violated the sexual standards that you profess.
2. As a community you do not demonstrate an understanding of the long-term effects on victims of the betrayal by a trusted religious. There is much evidence to show your disregard of that reality.
3. The violations by people who are appointed to offices of responsibility, abbot, prior, confessor, novice master, etc. are not simply solved by forgive and forget. Your behaviors demonstrate a patent disregard of good judgment and religious tradition. You do not have adequate supervisory and rehabilitation mechanisms in place.
4. Your training in celibacy is faulty and inadequate. Your system will continue to produce men who do not have a fighting chance to achieve the goals of their vow. Your system allows and in some cases fosters the tendencies to violate chastity and celibacy.

I am not speaking glibly or without doing my homework. I taught in your seminary and Woodstock Jesuit seminary (1967-70). Also I served as an adjunct professor at St. Mary's Pontifical Seminary (1972-84). I have authored seven books on celibacy and been an expert witness or consultant on more than 200 cases of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic clergy and the same for major Grand Jury investigations of clergy abuse.

Your treatment of Ben Spanier and his parents is more than neglectful. In

my mind it is criminal; and worse, you are not and have not approached this cancer within you in a Christian and intellectual way that is worthy of your history and tradition.

Courage,

A.W.RICHARD SIPE

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