

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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May 1, 2015
Abbot John Klassen
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Abbot John:

It is with dismay and disbelief that I received a report of your decision to delete or exclude names of monks credibly accused for sexual violations from the new list required by your recent settlement accord. Your agreement with victims to publish a complete list, but to exclude names previously acknowledged (your letter April 15, 2011) is disingenuous and frankly dishonest and destructive. Neglect to include names of other credibly alleged violators is unconscionable and duplicitous.

First, I will address only the two monks I knew listed by you in 2011 to be excluded from the new list—Abbot John Eidenschink and Brother Isaac Connolly. I interviewed some of their victims.

Second, I will address two other monks not listed—Abbot Timothy Kelly and Fr. Thomas Andert who have known allegations against them. Their victims have been credible and I interviewed them and referred them to appropriate authorities. Their histories are not unknown to you or the community.

Third, I will point out how destructive to the whole community the coverups have been and continue to be. This is a cancer that eats at the very heart of all the good the Abbey and community have done.

In regard to John Eidenschink: In 1971 two men who were members of the abbey traveled with great effort to Baltimore to consult with my wife, a psychiatrist, and me about sexual activity imposed on them by John who was Sub-Prior and their confessor at the time of their assaults.

Subsequently I learned of three other men who had been monks who received the same kind of treatment from John. I know that the monastery has made cash settlements with several of the men who chose to leave the community. I know that there are men who remain monks that John

subjected to similar treatment.

Brother Isaac Connolly abused a college student with whom he had maintained a friendship since the boy was a freshman in Prep School. When the victim was completing his studies during summer break, Isaac took him nude swimming in the college pool. He supplied alcohol and took the student to shower where he essentially raped him. These were Isaac's words: "I have waited eight years for this."

I was present at the mediation settlement of Isaac and several other victims in a Minneapolis law office. This victim was awarded 90K. During the day long meetings several other victims, not previously known to me, spoke to me about their abuse. All had been college students at the time.

My understanding is that your rationale for not listing the two above mentioned monks is because their victims were over 18 years old. What a subterfuge.

More college-aged men have been abused already at St. John's than is yet public. Monks should not be having sex with their institution's students and justifying the contact because it "may not be criminal". This is not what most parents send their sons to your care.

You know that the power differential between a priest or brother, and teacher with a student or worker defies the limit of age and consent —the person becomes vulnerable. Intimidation by a religious especially in a closed institution can be daunting.

John's and monks' consensual sex with other members of the community is a problem that continues within your cloister walls. John was one of the central figures that lead this Trojan horse into your courtyard.

Several ex-monks, good serious members of the community, contacted me after they left the abbey. They told similar stories: a monk friend told them that they needed some sexual experience to be mature and complete. They were willing and able to supply the experience. This drove some good men out the monastery.

If you are to be honest, Abbot John Eidenscink's name needs to be on your list of credibly accused abusers, as does Brother Isaac's. Anything less is

dishonest.

Now, two names that you cover up hold vital importance for the integrity of monastery—Abbot Timothy Kelly and Prior Thomas Andert.

Abbot Timothy has been credibly accused of abusing four minors while he served as assistant pastor at St. Anselm's parish in Bronx, N.Y. The primary victim contacted me because of my WEB page information. I interviewed him many times via phone and finally in person. There is no doubt in my mind he is telling the truth. I referred him to appropriate agencies and I know that you received his allegations.

I do not know Thomas Andert personally, but you have to be aware of my previous reporting. I am frankly encouraging men who were abused by Andert to come forward.

You said that two monks, Rene and D. Ward, evaluated Ben S's allegations and found "nothing" happened. That and nothing else you said has convinced me that a fair and thorough examination was made. Neither I nor members of my family who had first hand reports from Ben were consulted. I would hope to see this adjudicated in a court of law.

I fail to understand how you feel that the persistent dodging and cover up of sex and abuse at St. John' is beneficial or helpful to the progress and healing of the community.

Fr. Roman Paur and William Skudlarek have had their own burdens to conceal (The latter recorded in Paul Mark's archive at Notre Dame. Paur's background behavior at Catholic U stands.)

When the abbey called me in 1993-4 and requested help to deal with the sex abuse scandal I responded with my time, heart and soul. The 1994 National meeting of victims provided a springboard of good publicity for Collegeville.

In 1994 the Board of ISTI elected me chair of that group for a two-year tenure. I penned articles in national publications extoling the leadership St. John's was taking in the fight against child abuse. I thought you were leaders.

At a press conference I was asked why these initiatives held more hope than previous failed attempts. My response was that with ISTI “St. John’s had not invited lap dogs, but guard dogs to their effort.” [*dominicani* =dogs of the lord]

I accepted the 1993 commission from the concerned monks as a vocation and not merely a task.

The longer I was involved with the structures at St. John’s the clearer became power dynamics and forces of denial, obfuscation and obstructionism.

I confront you as clearly and respectfully as I can with my view and experience of your scandal problems and the essential corrupting dynamics that infest the structure of your institution.

These thoughts come with an abiding love of St. John’s and prayer for courage.

A.W.Richard Sipe

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On May 3, 2015, at 1:03 PM, Abbot John Klassen's private account wrote:

Dick,

We are dealing with a list of monks who are likely to have offended against minors because that has been the focus, given that the entire state of Minnesota is dealing with the Child Victims Act. Our recently published list also parallels the settlement the survivors' lawyers have worked out with the Archdiocese of Saint Paul & Minneapolis. As you know, we have been transparent in disclosing the names of monks who breached their vows and had inappropriate relations with adults. So, you are wrong when you say that the present release of names is sort of "cover-up." I hope that your public statements about Saint John's will be factual and, as such, will note that all of the credible allegations of abuse against minors involve incidents that occurred more than two decades ago. It is because of the Abbey's intentional and effective actions that we have achieved this success.

+John