
FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH



December 22, 2013

Dear Members of First Lutheran Church,

On Monday, December 16, 2013, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Winona, Minnesota disclosed the names of 14 priests who have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct with minors. This list was compiled a decade ago, and was released this week by court order.

One of those persons, James W. Lennon, was a member of our community. According to the Diocese's disclosure, Jim voluntarily left active ministry in June, 1984. Jim moved here in the late 1990s, and described himself as a former Roman Catholic priest. Jim held the position of Chamber of Commerce administrator when he died unexpectedly in August of 2000.

We share this information as Jim also—on a *very* limited basis—was involved in the ministry of First Lutheran Church. Jim's role included leading worship on behalf of First Lutheran at Fieldcrest Care Center in Hayfield in 1999, and, as best we can recall, Jim may have been guest preacher at a Wednesday evening courtyard worship service. On one occasion, Jim sang in First Lutheran's Sunday worship as a volunteer (guest soloist). Jim regularly worshiped at St Columbanus Catholic Church, and was a lector (a reader of Scripture lessons).

To our knowledge, there were no instances in which Jim served near, or with, minors of First Lutheran Church. However, in the spirit of openness and accountability, we share the information with you, and will continue to share any further information made public.

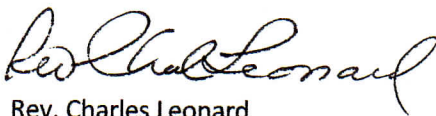
It is important to remember that the Diocese disclosed these priests' names, and the list of parishes they served, categorizing these priests as those who had *credible accusations* of misconduct with minors. This disclosure is not a statement of guilt, or of innocence, as in 13 of the 14 cases (including Jim's) these accusations were never turned over to law enforcement. The Diocese, who instead conducted their own internal investigations, has not, at this time, released the extent of accusation/s, nor given the location of their occurrence/s.

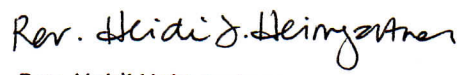
We, as your pastors, took an ordination vow that included these words: "to speak for justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed." We honor this sacred trust with you, as we live out the calling of ordained ministry. Your Church Council enacted a safety policy this fall, which included a requirement for criminal background checks for all staff members *and* for unsupervised adult volunteers. This commitment to safety is a continuous, worthy endeavor for all church bodies.

Many times these disclosures lead to a variety of feelings and questions. If any desire private, pastoral conversation around this topic, our doors are open.

Furthermore, we extend our support to our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in this community, who are feeling tremendous strain. Please keep them in your prayers.

With full confidence and abiding hope in Christ our Lord and Savior,


Rev. Charles Leonard


Rev. Heidi Heimgartner

Link to the disclosure published by Roman Catholic Diocese of Winona may be viewed at
<http://www.dow.org/Departments/LifeMarriageFamily/SafeEnvironmentProgram/Disclosures.aspx>

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