

DISSEMBLER IN CHIEF

Some men rise to the occasion when faced with, what seem to be, insurmountable problems. Others don't even step up, or worse, go backwards. In the Catholic Church arena, Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, the head of the Boston diocese, exemplifies the former. Bishop Lori, head of the Bridgeport, Connecticut Diocese, exemplifies the latter. Let's look at the record. Both dioceses suffered from sex, fraud and embezzlement scandals. The two oldest vices, sex and money, causing trouble. Add to that wicked brew, the obsessiveness of secrecy that seems to envelop every seminarian turned priest and you have the recipe for what ails the Church. The Churchgoing and giving public want accountability, transparency, and honesty in their leaders. But what do they get? Closed parishes and sexual abuse training that every volunteer must go through – when it's the priests who committed the crimes. What's that called – Transference? Cardinal O'Malley, however, bless his Franciscan soul, finally stood up and offered what should have been just the normal way of business for any Catholic Church, complete transparency to its faithful followers and contributors. As published in the Boston Globe on April 19, 2006, O'Malley opened the Boston diocese books releasing the most detailed financial accounting of any diocese in the country. O'Malley emphasized the key “to instilling confidence in parishioners was releasing information about the costs of the sexual abuse crisis and the sources of the money that paid for it”. Compare that to two of the most recent cases of dissembling by the head of the Bridgeport diocese – Bishop Lori. When confronted with proof that the pastor of St. John's of Darien was stealing by the car load, what did Bishop Lori do? He blamed the people who uncovered the fraud

for interfering and demoted the priest who did it! He was quoted in the Fairfield County Transcript as saying, and I paraphrase, "I gave the guy a break because he wasn't feeling good". Never mind that the New York Times reported the Diocese didn't follow its own rules about monitoring parishes finances. Was the "feeling bad" comment a cover-up? On July 29, 2006, according to the Connecticut Post, the tally was finally in, \$1.4 million in fraud over the last six years. Of course, one may wonder what happened since 1991 when the priest who committed the fraud was hired. What the dissembler in chief didn't disclose, however, is that over the last six years none of this should have happened, thus avoiding the loss of \$1.4 million and the untold hundreds of thousands spent to "uncover" the fraud.

Since the Bishop took office, continuing a warning I had given to Bishop Egan as well, I informed the Bishop that as the largest cash business in the world (the Sunday collection) the odds of fraud in the 88 parishes of the Diocese of Bridgeport was/is high. As a member of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, a cash business with no controls is much more likely than a business with controls to have fraud. These admonitions were always ignored. In fact, to drive home the point, I offered that my CPA firm perform random audits on Sundays of the 88 parishes, or 1.69 parishes visited per week. For that prescient advice, I received a threat of being arrested from Lori's in-house counsel. I responded to the taciturn Bishop Lori that to threaten a member of a family whose father raised money to build these schools and parishes, was a personal affront. It was also an insult to my six brothers and sisters who have all attended Catholic

schools grades 1 through 12 and sometimes beyond. But what can you expect when one is brought up to be hubristic and arrogant, and accountable to no lay human being.

Believe it or not, his second instance of dissembling may be worst than the first. In May he announced that the Diocese was selling St. Joseph's Manor but it would maintain its Christian identity. Dissembling: you bet. In keeping with the tradition, he, of course, said it would maintain its Christian tradition while secretly firing the Carmelite nuns who worked there since 1960. Equally offensive is his refusal to disclose the price he sold the manor for, another insult to volunteer parishioners who toiled long before he was on the scene!

For the above and much more, I am proud to bestow this title on Bishop Lori –
Dissembler in Chief.

Michael J. Knight
Parishioner
St. Stephen Parish
Diocese of Bridgeport
Trumbull, Connecticut 06611
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