

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

*Concerned Catholics of Missoula
Meeting with Bishop George Leo Thomas
May 31st, 2012 at 7:30 PM
St. Anthony Parish Center*

Opening Song: The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Gathering Prayer *Tom Hagen*

We gather conscious that the Spirit of Wisdom moves in each of us, as it has moved in all people since the beginning of human life, working in and through whom and what it has to work with.

May we be wise in our sharing, ready to speak truth to power, ready to listen, open to learning where new insights and knowledge may take us, drawing on wisdom that stands the test of time, and courageous enough to discard whatever can no longer sustain our faith.

We pray that our gathering may allow the Spirit of Wisdom to be expressed here as graciously and as clearly as is humanly possible.

AMEN

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

We Are Prophets of a Future Not Our Own *Dan Smith*

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise
that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom
always lies beyond us.
 No statement says all that could be said.
 No prayer fully expresses our faith.
 No confession brings perfection.
 No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
 No program accomplishes the church's mission.
 No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between
the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

AMEN

Cardinal John Dearden
October 25, 1979

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

The Priest Shortage *Gary Hughes*

Bishop Thomas – I had the privilege of meeting you at Christ the King when you first arrived in Montana and I welcome you again.

My comments to you today are about the shortage of Catholic Priests in the Diocese of Helena, Montana and across the United States.

Vatican II pronounced Eucharist the source and summit of our lives! When I celebrate the Eucharist my life is enriched with a connection to the Human Christ. When Christ the King and parishes around the World celebrate Eucharist the Catholic community is unified with one another as the Body of Christ.

I know when you arrived in Helena there had been a long on-going process to increase the number of seminarians. I must commend you and the Diocese for your efforts as I believe there are 12 men moving towards ordination.

For 50 years the laity in the Diocese of Helena and around the world has been asking for an open dialog about the celibate and married priesthood. The ordained are central to the Catholic Liturgy - to administer the sacraments and to preside at Eucharist. Without priests, numbers of parishioners dwindle, causing parishes to close as Holy Family did here in Missoula. As you know, that closure was a long and painful process.

Also, we must ask if it is morally correct to bring clergy from other countries – countries that may need their priests as much or more than we do. The foreign seminaries may also train these ordained in Pre-Vatican II practices and rituals, causing turmoil in the parishes they have been brought to America to serve.

The shortage of ordained clergy creates serious issues: parishes closing; limited hospital visitations; the lack of celebrants for many funerals; enlisting presiders from retirement that may have physical and mental difficulties celebrating a liturgy. The Catholic community deserves healthy priests – both minds and bodies. There is also the consequence of our active priests spread too thin to become an integral part of the communities they serve.

We know historically the church has and can change positions. There were married priests, bishops and popes for 1200 years. There are 10,000 “married priests” in the U.S. and 110,000 around the World. Seventy-eight percent of American Catholics would accept the married priesthood. Doesn’t this statistic indicate to you American Bishops and Rome that there is something terribly wrong with an institutional church that installed and maintains celibacy above its members receiving the Eucharist? With the stroke of a pen, parishes could be filled with ordained ministers that can celebrate liturgy, administer the sacraments and open the word of God.

Pope John XXIII threw open the doors and windows at Vatican II. 2,200 Bishops wanted change in the Catholic Church. In just 50 years a small number of Church leaders have found a way to close those doors and windows - without a council.

I close with a statement from a priest of 50 years – Father John J. Shea, School of Theology and Ministry, Boston College and I quote: “I plead with the American Catholic Bishops that they **craft a serious theological explanation** of why there cannot be celibate and married priests in the Catholic Church.”

Bishop Thomas, thank you again for traveling to Missoula and listening to our concerns and may peace be with you.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

Eucharist and Baptism *Donna Mollica*

I grew up in a Sicilian-American neighborhood in Brooklyn where daily mass was a regular part of life for women. Church was a center of social life in those days and Eucharist was the center of our *daily life*. So my understanding of Eucharist as the source and summit of my Christian life was instilled in me before conscious memory.

We are taught that the sacrament of Baptism creates the community we call Church when we are baptized “priest, prophet and king” in the mystical body of Christ. Many of us who take our Baptism and the moral imperative of Eucharist seriously have spent our lifetimes discerning the particular baptismal gifts of grace we have been given and finding ways to live out those gifts not only in the church but in our families and the larger society.

Our Catechism tells us that Eucharist is a mode of being, it is the impulse . . . given to the community for a practical commitment to build a more just and fraternal (sic) society (1327). And we are told that we require an ordained priesthood to celebrate Eucharist.

So Bishop Thomas, can you understand our dismay when Popes, Cardinals and Bishops stand by year after year as the number of priests and recognized vocations dwindle to such an extent that many of us have no access to weekly, let alone daily celebration of Eucharist? Can you understand our dismay, and sometimes our anger, when the baptismal gifts we feel called to share are ignored? Or the opportunity to share them in our church is taken away from us after years of training and service to our parishes?

As Church decision making becomes more centralized in Rome the real needs, concerns and hopes of the people in the “pews” seems to be less and less relevant to decision making.

We are asked ever more urgently to pray for vocations and of course we do because we are the ones in desperate need of priests. Can you understand our frustration that even as we pray, and God answers our prayers, the vocations of so many go unrecognized at best and demonized as “grave sin” at worst?

During a social justice conference in Helena, early in your service as our Bishop, you told us that as Catholics we cannot minister “*to*” the poor, we can only minister “*among*” the poor. The same is true within our Church. Our Pope, cardinals, bishops and priests cannot minister “to” us, you can only minister “among” us.

This is what we feel slipping away. This is what we long for.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

The New Roman Missal *Tamara Kittelson-Aldred*

I am not a “Cradle Catholic”, but entered the Church through RCIA after living many years as a committed Christian. I loved the liturgy and never missed attending Mass where I felt nourished at the table of Christ. The New Roman Missal has changed all that as I now force myself to attend church, feeling distanced from God by awkward language that no longer speaks what is in my heart. I cannot imagine how my developmentally disabled friends follow what is being said – and what about the children? The language used obscures the message of God’s love and grace while sending messages of fear and exclusivity. It does not nourish my spiritual life and sadly, the church hierarchy does not care.

The New Roman Missal *Reyanna Rice*

Good evening Bishop Thomas.

Since the new translation and implementation of the Revised Roman Missal, I keep asking myself "***Do I have a place at the Table of the Lord?***" Many Catholics struggle with the same question.

I pray and wrestle with this question. I study and read from a wide variety of sources including the documents of Vatican II. The language of the Revised Roman Missal leaves me feeling excluded from the celebration of the Eucharist.

As a woman, the use of non-inclusive language is especially painful. This deep and painful feeling of exclusion has crippled my ability to celebrate with my singing voice in the liturgy. I have sung in choir since fourth grade and for many years as a cantor. I feel almost as if my voice has been taken from me

Since Vatican II, like many Catholics, the Eucharist has become the source and summit of my life. I remember clearly what I felt as a young woman the first time I heard the Eucharist celebrated in ***simply constructed, accessible language that I could understand. I found those texts resonating with my lived experience. This was a moment of profound freedom and deep understanding in God.*** The language now in use is far from simple or accessible. Lengthy, convoluted prayers challenge the ability of a good English teacher to diagram them. I often am tempted to raise my hand and say "Excuse me. Could you please provide a synopsis of the prayer you just proclaimed so I can give full assent with my Amen."

Jesus promised "Where two or three are gathered, I am there." I believe in this promise. I am keenly aware of this promise when gathered with others to celebrate Eucharist. We share the bread and the cup. We do so in remembrance as Jesus commanded. In these actions, I find the primary presence of Christ. The new translation seems to emphasize sacrifice. This moves the focus from the community gathered in sharing and remembering to an exclusive focus on the sacrificial actions of the priest.

When I hear the words "for many" I hear words that mean some are excluded. The response "and with your spirit" emphasizes the ordained, placing him above and excluding the gathered community. Words about unworthiness cause me and others to wonder if we are welcome. Jesus does not exclude but welcomes and invites. The language employed in the Revised Roman Missal is a distraction from the invitation to engage in full and active participation.

Some people tell me "It is just words.....don't pay any attention to them". ***Words deeply pondered, shape people's lives. I pondered the words of the liturgy deeply. I sang them from the depths of my heart. This shaped my life. Now I struggle to find words to ponder and sing in the revised translation.***

Some say "If you don't like it, go find some other church. Go be a Protestant". ***I am a life-long Catholic. I am committed to the vision of life held by our Catholic tradition . To leave is simply not an option for me, even if at times I feel like I am hanging on by my fingernails.***

Bishop Thomas, thank you for listening to me.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

Collegiality and Dialogue *James Tackes*

Good evening, Bishop Thomas. As you may remember, my wife Rosemary and I visited with you several years ago in Helena.

Just a year ago on Pentacost weekend, Rosemary and I attended the American Catholic Council in Detroit, MI. We returned from that Pentacost celebration on fire with the Spirit manifest in that gathering. The fire that was awakened within us, compelled us to speak out and to share with others. That is what we have been doing this past year and also why we are here this evening to share that fire with you as well.

Even though I deeply respect the values of tradition, doctrine and church laws which guide us, I also respect the “signs of our times” as John XXIII told us at the beginning of Vatican II, as well as human experience (the *sensus fidelium*) as made manifest by Cardinal Newman and which became part of the documents of Vatican II.

Many feel that the demands for change in our church have not been given the importance and dialogue that they deserve. There are those that say that change is not possible because of tradition, doctrine or church law. **The reality however, is that our very roots as Christians were based on change.** In scripture there are many passages where Jesus made choices based on his conscience and the common good versus Jewish law, doctrine or tradition.

Vatican II changed a doctrine that was held sacred for 500 years, namely that there was no salvation outside of the Catholic Church. We came away from Vatican II with a new understanding that God’s love and salvation was available to all humankind.

People’s needs and life experiences need to be given consideration as a basis for change within our church. We presently have a substantial need for more ordained priests and yet we are not even permitted to discuss all of the possibilities to resolve this problem. The majority of American Catholics (the *sensus fidelium*) support a married priesthood today. When that *sensus fidelium* is ignored, what can we conclude but that “mandatory celibacy” trumps the church’s teaching that **“Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith life”**?

It is also evident that far too many wise and insightful laypersons in our church are simply not given the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the significant moral issues confronting us in the 21st Century. The current Church hierarchy continues to make decisions concerning women without the benefit of consulting those very women they are making life choices for. As a result many of the faithful are making their own choices of conscience and the official teachings of the church are to them irrelevant.

Vatican II challenged us to create an atmosphere of open dialogue, mutual listening and mutual respect **without limitations**. We are hopeful that this sharing with you here tonight is just the beginning and can be an ongoing opportunity for us all in our parishes and in our diocese.

Vatican II said that we, the people of God, are the Church and we believe that! We also believe that it is imperative **for the sake of the church** that we be allowed to speak openly and honestly about all issues and potential solutions that seriously impact our well being as the Body of Christ.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

Social Justice *Barb Zuuring*

The mandate for social justice - to take action to serve the common good, is rooted in the word of God and central to Catholic Social Teaching. One scripture passage that inspires me is the words of the prophet Micah who asked the Israelites “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8

We have so many opportunities to work for peace and justice. Catholic Relief Services, Maryknoll and the diocesan Guatemalan missions, Jubilee and Catholic Worker movements, as well as the social outreach programs of our own parishes are all ways that further a preferential option for the poor and marginalized and put Catholic Social Teaching into action. Why is it “Our Best Kept Secret”?

Sister Eileen Egan, a cofounder of the peace organization Pax Christi, coined the term the Seamless Garment of Life to promote a holistic view of the sacredness of life! When we support equity in trade relations, food security and access to resources, stewardship of the earth, health care, affordable housing, and the rights of migrants along with opposition to war, racism, sexism and capital punishment we promote life. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin called for a “consistent ethic of life” that would equally balance the right-to-life of the unborn with the quality of life of young and old at every stage. Pro-life is not a single issue!

The basis of our commitment to social justice lies in the inherent dignity of each human person. The compassion and mercy shown by Jesus must be fully extended by church leaders to divorced and homosexual Catholics not just pedophile priests. The challenge to right social relationships includes our relationship with clergy and hierarchy within the Catholic Church as well. A hierarchy that marginalizes and dominates women, that excludes women from participation in ministry and church governance does not espouse the dignity of all members of the Body of Christ. We all need a place at the table!

What Would Jesus Do? *Patricia Zapp*

Thank you for coming Bishop Thomas. I am a Certified Catholic Chaplain Emeritus.

Pope John XXIII opened the doors and windows of the Church with Vatican II which brought a spirit of openness to the world. No longer were we in the U.S. to be a “Fortress Church”. We, the laity were also priestly people, where priest were “servant leaders” in our community. No longer were females excluded from the sanctuary. Girls could be altar servers and women and men were encouraged to be cantors and lectors. Mass was finally in English.

Now after years of reform of Vatican II reforms we find the Church retrogressing to the Pre-Vatican II Church where the emphasis is on people measuring up to the Church rather than the Church ministering to the people. I refer specifically to the treatment of our gay and lesbian friends and family in committed relationships and our divorced and remarried brothers and sisters who are excluded from joining us in receiving the Eucharist. Where is Jesus in this policy of exclusion?

I don't have the answer, but I saw a ray of hope when I read what Cardinal Christoph Schornborn of Vienna said recently: “In all moral questions we must always first consider the individual human being. Jesus always considered the individual first and not the law”. Priests should learn to walk the tightrope

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

between canon law and true mercy as Jesus practiced it by asking what Jesus would have done in each problematic situation and follow his example.

It is extremely troubling that the reception of the Eucharist seems to be a reward for compliance with the law, rather than a grace-filled experience for those who in good faith and conscience want to participate and may be in most need of spiritual nourishment.

Bishop Thomas, I pray to the Holy Spirit that all Catholics someday soon will be able to join us at the table and receive the Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Gifts of Women to the Church *Rick Aldred*

Women have always been at the core of the Christian faith and its expression, the Church. In all four gospels, women were the first to witness the resurrection of the Lord. Priscilla, Phoebe and many other women were leaders in the very early church, as we know from the letters of Paul. From time immemorial, mothers have taken the responsibility to pass on the faith to their children, thus assuring the continued existence of the Church.

Women, both lay and religious have been and continue to be those who do the work needed to support the infrastructure of the Church – from the most menial tasks to works of mercy that truly give the Gospel feet and hands. We as the Church need to formally recognize the value of this half of the human family by restoring to women roles of leadership and responsibility with the power needed for these roles.

America's Women Religious *Rosemary Tackes*

Good evening everyone. Thank you for being here.

First of all, Bishop Thomas, I'd like to thank you for speaking out at the Bishops' Conference on "preferential treatment for the poor". As you know this is an issue that is front and center for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Like you, Bishop Thomas, many of us in this gathering have been trained and educated by Women Religious. I attended grade and high school under the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. I am also a BVM Associate for the past eight years.

Many Catholics across the country are incensed by the recent suppression of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the imposition of Bishops to oversee these women and to bring them quote "in line" with church doctrine. Myself included.

I simply want to say a heartfelt thank you to all of the Sisters in this room and in this country who have helped to form me and to form the church that we belong to today. As they continue to stand for social justice and for the oppressed I stand in solidarity with them.

It is my sincere hope and prayer that all of the laity, clergy and bishops who know the true goodness of these very special women will also have the courage and integrity to stand up and be counted among those who support our sisters.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

These Women Religious who live in God's steadfast love have embraced and implemented Vatican II in every moment of their daily lives and I believe that they absolutely exemplify the Risen Christ amongst us today.

The Psychology of the Goodness of Humanity *Jan Wollersheim*

Bishop Thomas, my name is Jan Wollersheim. All my life I have been a Catholic. I was educated in Catholic schools and universities. By profession, I am a clinical psychologist. I am happy to report that after outgrowing its adolescent rebellion against God, religion and spirituality, psychology has matured.

Research clearly shows that people's spirituality is associated with better mental and physical health, greater longevity, more productivity, and increased contentment. However, these results apply to beliefs grounded in God as love, which advocate compassion and understanding toward others. Beliefs grounded in an angry, punishing God and stressing exclusion of those not sharing a philosophy of unworthiness and atonement are not associated with these positive outcomes.

I am saddened to see our Church hierarchy reverting to pre-Vatican II values, with emphasis on atonement, unworthiness and exclusion. Clearly our Church hierarchy must enlighten itself and emphasize God as love and promulgate a philosophy of loving our neighbors no matter how different they may be from us.

Self-Awareness *Mary Louise Zapp-Knapp*

Good evening, Bishop Thomas. I am a life-long Catholic. I attended Catholic schools, graduating from Santa Clara University and was a Catholic school teacher.

With Vatican II, I had great hopes that my church was emerging out of the primitive fear-based theology and exclusivity into the light of new awareness of the Body of Christ with the widening of our circle of compassion. Sadly, my church has regressed back into this primitive fear-based theology, exclusivity and consequential dysfunction. Our loving God made us in the image of God, in that we humans can become self-aware--- aware of the self as part of the entirety of God's creation, part of the interconnected whole, the unity of Oneness, One Body, the Body of Christ.

To *Be Aware* is to recognize, know, acknowledge and appreciate our God and the unity of all creation. To *Be Aware* is an open and receptive mode of operation, welcoming diversity and change. To *Beware* is to be wary, to be afraid and fearful. It is a closed and rejecting mode of operation, with a need to control others as a means of maintaining a sense of certainty and security.

Self-Awareness necessitates dissolving this delusion of separateness and realizing our participation in the unity of Oneness, One Body, the Body of Christ.

A healthy integrated human body is comprised of a complex set of well functioning intercommunicating systems- open and receptive to the exchange of information with an ability to respond quickly and functionally for the well-being of the whole body.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

An unhealthy body lacks integration. Communication systems are faulty. Consequently the body's systems may respond inappropriately and damage itself. When the body is damaging itself we call that an auto-immune disease.

I consider the pedophilia, on-going cover-up, complicity with and protection of predators to be just one among many aspects of this auto-immune disease within the Body of Christ. I consider the close-mindedness and rejection of the caring and spiritual intelligentsia among our membership to be another aspect of this auto-immune disease. An auto-immune disease is chronic, extraordinarily difficult to treat and, as far as we know, incurable.

What would Jesus Christ do about this condition? Would he even recognize this body, this church, as his in its present institutional form and function?

I pray that, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, our church's leadership will emerge out of the *Beware* state and into the higher functioning *Aware* state for the well-being of all.

A Mother's Thoughts about Her Children and the Church *Gloria Horejsi*

Bishop Thomas, Like many of us, our first efforts at evangelization were with our own children. We took them to church and taught them what Christ taught us.

In time they grew and became independent of us. They also became independent of the Church as they moved into new lives.

Like many other parents, I would like to invite our children back to the Catholic Church. But my children cannot imagine belonging to a church that does not accept women on an equal basis with men. That does not welcome their friends who are living in committed homosexual unions. And that does not welcome, without reservation, their friends who have lived through the pain of divorce, and are finding healing now in a new relationship.

My prayer is that the Church leadership can open their hearts to reach out and heal these wounds of separation.

What About the Next Generation of Catholics *James "Ike" Moody*

After 25 years of pre-marital ministry in both Idaho & Montana, my wife and I have reached a milestone of sorts, we have administered 400 inventories and of these, there are 120 so-called "millennial generation" that have taken the PREPARE/ENRICH premarital inventory.

Let me speak of the millennial generation we know best. Both our son & daughter attended Catholic elementary and high school. Our son was active in CYC leadership & Legendary Lodge. Upon completion of high school he opted not to enroll in college but rather went to New Mexico with his godfather to attend formal men's rites of passage and then he left for 8 months in Ireland and for six months he worked in a homeless shelter in Cork, Ireland.

Our daughter was in the confirmation program during that time. The program director called me because he knew our son had not been confirmed yet. He also knew he had attended the initiation rites in New

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

Mexico and was now serving in ministry in Ireland. He asked me if he would like to be confirmed with his sister (*even though he had not gone through the formal confirmation program*). He agreed and when he returned from Ireland, our bishop right here at St Anthony parish confirmed both him and his sister. Our son then attended Gonzaga University and graduated with degrees in Art & Theology.

Neither our son nor our daughter is currently active in the church. *And what a loss for our church.* One wise bishop said, “All of my best Catholics have left the church at sometime and then came back.” The changes in our liturgy have done nothing to bring this *younger generation* back to our church.

Our daughter has told me “Dad what if I do not get married in the church?” As I mentioned, we have been involved in pre-marital ministry for over 25 years now and when our children were small, they would ask us “*Is another couple coming to our home tonight?*” They grew up and even matured with our couple ministry. At times we might speak a little louder one night, knowing that our children would hear some advice we might give an engaged *couple*.

What a loss for our church if these young adults do not return to it!

Sexual Abuse and The Culture of Clericalism *Magy Stelling*

Bishop Thomas, thank you for being here. In choosing to speak on the topic of Clericalism, I had to ask myself where is this choice coming from? I also struggled with the question whether what I want to say will lead me to a closer relationship with God? Or will it simply stir up the tensions and conflicts already within me? Will my words fall on deaf ears, a deafness that is increasingly apparent in our Catholic world as the Vatican and Curia turn away from the promises of Vatican II? Bishop Thomas, I understand you also are a part of the hierarchy, thus a part of the culture of clericalism. I also realize you are an integral partner with The People of God, Our Church. This last statement gives me hope.

So it is with trepidation and respect for your office along with my personal respect for you as a human being that I share my thoughts and experiences.

A naive, young adult is groomed for over a year before the sexual abuse by a priest took place. After the abuse she blamed herself and was filled with shame. She told only one person and that was in the sacrament of penance in a distant parish. There the priest confessor shamed her. Within weeks a parishioner (a personal friend) showed up at her home and announced that an appointment had been set up for her with a psychiatrist. The friend would take her to this doctor’s appointment. She was also told that her doctor and hospital bills “would be taken care of”. (Two years later this parishioner related it was the pastor who asked her to perform this task.) After a short interview with the psychiatrist she agreed to hospitalization and the following morning began 6 weeks of ECT (electro-convulsive treatment).

With her memory now impaired and her confidence shaken to the core, she was advised to never look back, get married and “live her life”. Two years later her minimum wages were threatened with garnishment if she did not pay the hospital bill. She never received a bill or threat from the doctor. She left the Church, her faith in God skewed, her trust in humankind shredded, and endowed with an inability to share or respond to any type of human intimacy even though she later married and had two children. She divorced after ten years from that sham of a marriage.

She finally returned to the Church (a Vatican II Church) some 35 years later because of an overwhelming desire to receive the Eucharist. It took another 13 years to finally tell her story and receive much needed help. From the time of the abuse by the priest she had remained silent for nearly 45 years.

I am that survivor! And as such, I think I am qualified to speak of the damaging effects of Clericalism. For me

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

the word clericalism refers to the assumption by many clerics that they are inherently superior -- spiritually, morally and intellectually --- to the laity. Given that attitude of superiority, they presume an entitlement to extraordinary protections and privileges. Unfortunately, clericalism is deeply embedded in our Church's organizational structure.

This culture of clericalism has inflicted enormous harm on the survivors of abuse by its secrecy, cover-ups, locked files, and destroyed documents. All too many priests and bishops tend to somehow blame the victim of abuse, and thereby implant guilt and shame within the victim. That guilt and shame is the prime reason for suicide among some victims of clergy abuse. Given my own experiences with priests and church officials, I hope you can understand my reluctance to trust the hierarchy.

As the abuse by clergy has become public, church leaders have fought long and hard against the efforts to extend the civil and criminal statutes of limitations in reporting accusations in many states. Efforts by church leaders to hide the abuse have now raised concerns among civil authorities and law enforcement and prompted the filing of at least two criminal charges against Church authorities. Court testimony and documents have made sordid details public concerning how our Church Hierarchy chose to betray and disgrace the People of God and subvert civil laws and norms of human decency.

Sadly, the abuse scandals and the cover-ups by bishops have damaged the image and reputation of all priests. It has demoralized many good priests. Many priests feel ashamed at how the church leadership has conducted itself. This culture of clericalism drives a wedge between the laity and the clergy. The attitude of clericalism is far removed from the life and teachings of Jesus. Clericalism has created an image of the ordained as a highly privileged group, instead of magnanimous servants of God as taught by Jesus.

And so, Bishop Thomas I ask that you hear my words -- in your heart and conscience --- and meditate on them. Choose where and how you can most honestly address my pleas with your fellow bishops. As a survivor of clerical abuse, I sincerely hope that you will listen and that I will not conclude, once again, that I am simply beating my head against this stone wall of clericalism. I know I am joined by many more worldwide, including clergy; therein I find hope and solidarity as I hear pebbles falling from this stonewall.

Thank you for being here tonight, Bishop and listening to us all and peace be with you.

We Are the Church *Joe Perine*

Good evening Bishop Thomas, and thank you for joining us for this dialogue. I am Joe Perine, and I have some questions that I would like to pose to you for your prayerful consideration. My focus will be on the body of the church.

Who are the "we" in the statement, "We are the church?" I interpret the word "we" as a pronoun denoting the church as both plural and personal. If this is true, then why do I feel so disempowered and disengaged from the leadership of the church that I love? Am I no longer part of the "we?" Is "we" to be interpreted in current Roman Catholic parlance as Pope Benedict, the Cardinals, and the rest of the church hierarchy? I have a suspicion that this is so. Thus, I sense that my affiliation with my faith community is being eroded by what I see as a hijacking of Catholicism by a dogmatic and counterproductive bureaucracy, which has lost sight of who "we" are and *our* spiritual needs.

As a former counselor, I always told my clients that remaining in a dysfunctional relationship is a tacit affirmation of that association. Now, I am faced with a choice: do I stay faithful to my Catholic upbringing, or do I search for a community that better supports my spiritual growth? Should I engage in a battle to save my faith, or is this no battle at all? Is the outcome already clear and decisive? Have I become a devout coward? I need help answering these questions.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

“We” as Catholics, are being directed to evangelize on behalf of our faith; “we” are to become stewards of spirituality to return lost sheep to our fold (Luke 15:4-6); “we” are to welcome the prodigal son home (Luke 15:23-24). Now I ask you, how do “we” do this when “we” have lost our identity and our voice?

I submit that if “we” are the beloved church, then I pray that the church hierarchy will recognize our value, affirm our relevance, and march forward with us to save the Roman Catholic Church.

Closing Statement to Bishop Thomas *Con Kelly*

First of all, I personally want to thank you for coming here this evening. As I sit here and listen, it occurs to me that you are in an extremely difficult position. You have a tough job—one that I would not envy.

In addition to the daily demands of your office, I can imagine you to be torn by conflicting loyalties to which you are pledged. On the one hand, your position requires loyalty to the Pope and fraternity with your brother (ahem!) bishops. I have wonderful memories of bishops in this diocese—Joseph Michael Gilmore who ordained me, and of mine and so many others' hero, Raymond G. Hunthausen,— and of others of less happy memory. As a former clergy person, I am aware that, of necessity, you must associate with all your colleagues. There is, however, no requirement that you always agree with them or count all of them as friends.

I wouldn't presume to know how or where you find yourself with other members of the U.S. Conference of Bishops. However, recent church-related events in Madison, Pittsburg, Philadelphia, Kansas City and Seattle, to say nothing of the recent bombshell involving LCWR, would leave me to believe that within this group trying to follow your own compass is not a walk in the park.

On the other hand, you are bishop and pastor to the people of this diocese, among whom are many faithful and loyal people like those to whom you have listened to this evening—life-long learners all. Far be it from me to offer advice as to how to go about reconciling these conflicting views.

I could, however, identify a goal, one hedged in hope. It is a mutual goal: that we support you in efforts to re-establish our church as one that inspires and attracts rather than one that embarrasses and depresses its membership. Please know that as a group we stand ready to assist you in working toward that goal.

Statements to Bishop Thomas – May 31, 2012

Closing Prayer *Kaycee Schilke*

Gracious God, our loving Parent, we are grateful for the presence of Your Spirit among us this evening.

We are grateful for Bishop Thomas's willingness to come to Missoula and spend this time with us, listening to each of us. We ask you to continue to give him Your wisdom, guidance and discernment as he shepherds his people.

We are grateful for the courageous, honest and depth of sharing we have heard tonight as people expressed our concerns and the impact they have had on their lives and on their families.

We ask Your Spirit of Love and Wisdom to bless and fill us all as we journey together to continue to build Your Kingdom on earth.

AMEN

Closing Song: Companions on the Journey

We are companions on the journey,
Breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
We believe in the love of our God.

No longer strangers to each other,
No longer strangers in God's House;
we are fed and we are nourished
by the strength of those who care.
By the strength of those who care.

We have been gifted with each other,
And we are called by the Word of the Lord;
to act with justice, to love tenderly
and to walk humbly with our God.
To walk humbly with our God.

We are companions on the journey,
Breaking bread and sharing life;
And in the love we bear is the hope we share
For we believe in the love of our God,
We believe in the love of our God.