

Lamorinda Catholic churches not immune from sexual predator clergy

By Nick Marnell

Three Roman Catholic priests who served as associate pastors at Lamorinda parishes appeared on a list of clergy “credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors,” released Feb. 17 by the Diocese of Oakland. Two of the priests worked at the Church of Santa Maria in Orinda and one had been assigned to St. Monica Church in Moraga. Allegations of sexual abuse of minors had been charged against at least one other priest who served in a Lamorinda parish, but though named in the Oakland report as credibly accused, he was not listed as having worked in Lamorinda.

According to information provided by the diocese, Robert Freitas served at St. Monica

from June of 1988 until March 1990, Gary Lagasse worked at Santa Maria in 1972 and Gary Tollner was assigned there in 1971-72. All three had been credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors.

“My first reaction in seeing the list of names of priests who have abused, is one of deep shame. These are monstrous crimes, committed by priests who are supposed to model virtue and grace, not sin and harm. By publishing this list, I am making an ‘Act of Contrition’ on behalf of my Church,” Bishop Michael Barber said in a statement.

Robert Ribeiro appeared in the diocese report but it made no mention of his 1971-80 tenure at St. Perpetua Church in Lafayette, where he was listed as having served in a 2018 report

on clergy sexual abuse in the Bay Area. The report was compiled by the Minneapolis law firm Jeff Anderson and Associates, which represents clergy abuse victims.

Three of the accused Lamorinda priests have died and in 2008 Lagasse was excommunicated, the most severe penalty administered by the Catholic Church. A fifth priest, who worked three assignments in the 1980s at Saint Mary’s College in Moraga and had been accused of fondling an altar boy, had the charges dismissed in 2017, according to the Catholic Sentinel.

“There has been no credible incident of abuse of a minor by a priest or deacon of the Diocese of Oakland since 1988. I can assure that today, no priest or deacon who is in active ministry in the Diocese of Oakland has a

credible allegation of abuse of a minor,” Barber said.

Officials of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests called the publication of the list a good first step, but said that the diocese still lacked transparency. “What the diocese should provide are not only all of the names of all who lived or worked in the diocese who are accused, but also their specific work histories, when the diocese first learned of the abusive behavior, and their actions towards that priest to limit the damage he caused then and could cause in the future,” Northern California SNAP representative Dan McNevin said.

The organization explained that, according to government

and law enforcement statistics, the average clergy abuse victim does not come forward until 30 or more years have passed. “If no one has come forward yet in the Lamorinda area, that does not mean that no children were molested there,” SNAP Northwest Leader Joey Piscitelli said. “I’ve talked to numerous clergy sex abuse victims that waited much longer than 30 years to come forward, and I urge anyone in the Lamorinda area who is ready to come forward to contact police.”

None of the priests named in this article had been accused of sexual abuse of minors while serving in the Lamorinda parishes.

Letters to the editor

A matter of education

In the February newsletter the MSD superintendent Bruce Burns cites the need to pay for teacher pensions as the primary reason the district must limit other spending. He thanks the Moraga Education Foundation for supporting, art, music and PE programs and he gives as an example of cost control a reduction in special education.

So in Moraga climbing walls, and trombones are more important than the disabled students, who after all really don’t use them and probably won’t have important lives anyway. Is that how it is Mr. Burns? Cut the funds for those who have no options so that you can fund the latest educational fad or not take heat from the sports fans?

How mean spirited, how selfish to put the these things above giving help, kindness and the best opportunity possible to a group of our chil-

dren who need our care and protection. How we treat, how we care for, those less fortunate is the mark of our humanity. A donation for a climbing wall or a computer for your already well off children is just plain selfish when even one of our children carries a lifetime burden that we could ease in anyway.

David Gow
Moraga

Understanding destructive California fires – more than ignition sources

In the editorial, “Camp Fire revelation is last straw; PG&E must be replaced” (March 1), the Bay Area News Group again demonstrates it’s extreme bias against PG&E and its limited understanding of the complex issues surrounding the destructive California wildfires. It is overly simplistic and disingenuous to blame the utility for the terri-

ble California fires even if ignition sources are substantiated.

Ignition sources are part of the equation. There are many other reasons why the California fires caused loss of life and were so destructive, besides ignition sources. Prolonged severe droughts, spontaneity, extremely high intensity of the fires, climate engineering, and other anthropogenic causes were major contributors. These other factors need to be analyzed and understood. Most, if not all of these other factors, are not within the purview of PG&E.

Claiming that the utility “... cannot continue to exist in its current form” presupposes that the editors have the knowledge, experience and “knowhow” to address these complex issues. Clearly, they do not.

Chris Knief
Orinda

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Candell to recuse from Deer Hill project, three others reject call to recuse

... continued from Page A3

Following Candell’s announcement, Vice Mayor Mike Anderson, Council Member Teresa Gerringer and Mayor Cam Burks all read identical statements that during the closed session they gave consideration to claims (made by a letter from Save Lafayette) that they should also recuse themselves and said that after consultation with the city’s attorney they do not believe there is any reason to do so.

Save Lafayette contends that, based on the logic given that Candell should recuse, Burks’ involvement as chair of the “Yes on Measure L” campaign and Gerringer’s and Anderson’s endorsement and

support of the campaign should by the same token require their recusals.

In fact, says Candell, “The letter from Save Lafayette argues that this entire process is biased because the three other council members were not also forced to recuse, even though they worked very closely for a long time with the developer on Measure L.

“Letters were written describing residents’ dissatisfaction with council in this matter, which has done absolutely nothing to help support their fellow council member, me, during this process,” says Candell.

In a follow-up letter from Wenter to Hodil dated Feb. 28 in which the attorneys address what they describe as Candell’s

“material animosity” to the developer citing specific posts from social media, the developer’s attorney expresses deep concern that Candell intends to retain her right to speak as a private citizen and requests the name of her personal attorney.

The letter states, “We are deeply concerned about the role Council Member Candell apparently believes she can play opposing the project even as a private citizen, notwithstanding her acknowledged conflict of interest affecting our clients’ due process rights, and will address that critical issue separately.”

Burks said that it would not be appropriate for him to comment on anything related to city council closed session.

Lafayette BART-owned land

... continued from Page A2

In response to a question from Council Member Steven Bliss, Thorne-Lyman said that the bill requires rezoning all BART-owned land even if they have no plans to develop.

Burks considers this very good news for Lafayette, explaining that in his meeting, “I

once again reiterated to the BART general manager that Lafayette is not anti-development – that we are for smart, controlled growth in our downtown core area that involves high-density units, including affordable housing, near our public transportation – and that we have a strong, proven track record to

show we have been successful in this space. I indicated that we are against Sacramento stripping our local control in the land use and development space – as AB 2923 does – because we do indeed know how to grow in an appropriate way; a way that addresses and does our part vis-à-vis the Bay Area housing crisis.”

Moraga Library HVAC woes continue

... continued from Page A4

Woehleke recommended that, in the future, the library purchases a system with less bells and whistles to fix.

Korpus will ask her husband, an electrical engineer, to take a look at the boiler and possibly provide some diagnostic answers.

During the public com-

ment portion, Friends of the Library Board Member Jane Low cited additional existing maintenance issues. “The library is an old building. It’s not at the top of everybody’s list for maintenance. My concern is unless you make a lot of complaints, nobody really pays a lot of attention to it. I urge you to pay more attention to the library.”

The town council unanimously gave the town manager authorization to use funds in the Minor Capital Improvement Program not to exceed \$40,000 toward the Moraga Library HVAC repairs.

The library will remain open during the repair process, which is expected to be completed by mid-April.