

SOCIETY OF JESUS



OREGON PROVINCE

Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Dear Friends,

All of us deeply desire a closer union with Christ. As Jesuits, our vows are meant to draw us into the mystery of Jesus' own life, and our prayer is the bond that holds us to Him.

During the second week of the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius invites us to prayerfully consider three kinds of humility. The third kind leads to a profound prayer: asking to suffer indignities just as Jesus did. That prayer points toward the suffering and death of Jesus, which is in the third week of the Exercises.

Even for those of us whose faith is strong, that is a difficult prayer to make. For us whose faith is not so strong, it may be the one prayer we hope God doesn't hear.

I believe the Oregon Jesuit Province is living the third week of the Exercises. I know we are feeling profound humiliation. We feel shame in admitting some of our companions have failed to live their vows. We recognize and acknowledge the suffering and pain those failures have caused. As a province we feel remorse, and we have tried our best to provide whatever healing and reconciling help we can offer those who suffer.

Over the last six years, we have reached financial settlements in over 200 claims against us. In doing so, we have depleted our available resources. What primarily remains are funds people have donated specifically for the care of our senior men and for the formation of our younger men. There is also a very small amount that was donated for specific apostolic purposes. The rest of our money is gone.

In December 2007, the Province paid settlements that totaled \$55 million. Our insurance covered about \$48 million of that, but the rest came from our own resources. After that, we knew our ability to offer financial help to other victims was nearing the end.

To resolve any pending claims and to continue any hope of Jesuit ministry in the Pacific Northwest, we needed legal help to restructure our debts. Our financial situation is similar to many other organizations forced to seek reorganization.

This reality is humiliating for us to admit. And we Jesuits realize that our humiliation is felt by many of you, too. You, who are our closest friends and supporters of the good work we have accomplished.

But in this humiliation I believe there is grace. I trust in God's mercy.

The weakness we experience and the failures we acknowledge are a reminder that our redemption does not come from anything we have or will ever accomplish. Redemption comes from the suffering and death Christ experienced for all of us.

I believe God is answering our prayer and is granting our deepest desire. Becoming united more closely with Christ means we must experience the humiliation and desolation Christ suffered at Gethsemani. That was His darkest hour, and I believe this is now ours.

To those of you who are our companions and our friends, I extend my gratitude as well as my prayers and support. We are as dependent on you now as we ever were. I know these coming months and years are not going to be easy for any of us. There is a great deal of uncertainty and darkness on the road ahead of us. But at the end, I am convinced, lies the bright, shining hope of Resurrection.

Of this, I am absolutely sure.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pat Lee SJ", written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick J. Lee, S.J.,
Provincial