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Crosier Fathers and Brothers Analysis and Commentary On November 24, 2002 Star Tribune article

The Crosier Fathers and Brothers are deeply troubled by the Star Tribune's November 24 article, which misleads readers and falsely characterizes the order as trying to cover up sexual misconduct. As the Star Tribune reporters were preparing their story, we responded to nearly 50 questions they asked us. They did not report our responses to a number of questions that would have provided more balance.

Here is our analysis and commentary on the deficiencies in the Star Tribune article.

Inaccuracies

There are at least two significant inaccuracies in the article.

In Paragraph #6, it is stated, "...they didn't say how many cases they've settled or how much they paid to victims." The last part of this sentence is untrue. We originally provided information about money paid out to victims to reporters Meryhew and Graves in June 2002, then we provided that information to reporters Meryhew and Graves again in responses to their questions on November 18, 2002. In the very next paragraph the article reports that Crosiers "...have paid a total of approximately \$800,000 to all victims of sexual misconduct." They also did not indicate that this amount was for financial settlements and counseling, which they were told.

In Paragraph #20, it is stated, "The Crosiers also identified perpetrators who abused more than one victim..." This sentence is inaccurate. The Crosiers identified all Crosiers known to have sexually abused minors, including those who have only one reported incident of abuse. We have provided this information to the Star Tribune reporters who wrote this article, and it is available on our web site.

Story Placement

The prominent treatment given to this story misleads readers as to the importance of the information contained in it. The inflammatory headline and subhead imply wrongdoing that is not substantiated in the article that follows.

Placement of story above the fold, on page A1, with the largest type-sized headline on the page conveys a sense of alarm and suggests that the article contains information of pressing importance to a large segment of readers. This story does not present new information. Nothing in this story is cause for alarm; it does not present information that has pressing importance for a large segment of your readers.

The prominence and weight tell the reader the story has greater importance than actions the President of the United States was taking in his effort to recruit support for a war with Iraq. By contrast, the October 10, 2002 edition of the Star Tribune carried an article about the completion of the Crosier sexual misconduct investigation and adoption of a strengthened Sexual Misconduct Policy. That article appeared not on A1, but on B1, the front page of the second section, with a headline written

in smaller type.

There is nothing in the story that provides the kind of news or information that justifies this prominent treatment:

- **The article does not expose a current danger to the public.** While the information in the article is presented in a way that leads readers to believe Gregory Madigan presents some clear, current danger to the public, there is no explicit allegation that such is the case, and there is no outside evidence presented that would support such an allegation. Nowhere in the story is there a suggestion that Madigan has committed an act of abuse since the 1980s. In fact, the Summary Report from the Faegre & Benson investigation states that the most recent incident of sexual abuse of a minor that has been reported occurred more than 15 years ago, and that there have been no reported incidents of sexual abuse of a minor by a Crosier after he has been placed on restriction. In fact, Madigan is living under restrictions that keep him from being in public without adult supervision. None of these facts, readily available on the Crosier web site, were reported.
- **Public safety has not been compromised by a cover up.** While the headline, subhead and first paragraph suggest that Crosiers have “withheld” information, nowhere in the article is there evidence or allegation that the Crosiers failed to disclose information that impacts the safety of the public. Indeed, there is no explanation of how answers to the questions the reporters have asked would benefit the broad public audience of Star Tribune readers.
- **Crosier response is not ‘news.’** This article focuses significant space to criticizing the Crosiers for not answering these questions: how many cases have been settled; how many incidents of abuse have occurred; and where is Gregory Madigan living. This article merely repeats the same questions that appeared in a Star Tribune article on October 10, 2002, written by the same reporters. In neither article was there any explanation of why answers to these questions are important to the public. The important facts to be disclosed were disclosed, namely the identity of those who had abused minors, and the restrictions that are in place.
- **There is no significant impact on majority of Star Tribune readers.** The only societal impact cited in the article is that “lack of candor threatens credibility” with two members of St. Odilia parish. This seems to be the news peg around which the article is structured. Placing this article in such prominent position based on the reaction of the two people quoted seems to lack balance and proportion. At most, the relationship between Crosiers and the parish affects members of the parish, but has very little impact beyond the parish.

Overall Fairness

Beyond the lack of balance that stems from the inappropriate prominent placement of this article on page A1, the article itself lacks balance and fairness.

Allegation of lack of candor

The headline, subhead, and first paragraph are inflammatory. In a very strict sense, they may be technically accurate. However, with a very sensitive topic such as sexual abuse in what has become highly charged environment, this treatment leads the reader to believe that the Crosiers have been intentionally deceptive in a way that results in unknown danger lurking somewhere.

- Nowhere in the article is there evidence or allegation that the Crosiers failed to disclose

information that impacts the safety of the public.

- Nowhere in the article is there an explanation of how society would benefit from knowing the details the reporters asked for.
- The article includes no comment from a disinterested, third party expert on matters of disclosure related to sexual abuse by clergy or religious, as to whether the Crosier response to questions about case-specific details was appropriate or not appropriate.

The article neither references nor defines any standard of disclosure to be followed in reporting of sexual misconduct by clergy or religious. To my knowledge, there is no such standard. In fact, there has been very little consistency across the country about what has been and what has not been reported publicly by dioceses and religious orders about sexual misconduct.

While I have not done a thorough analysis of news media coverage, I am aware of only one other instance where a Church body has voluntarily done what the Crosiers have done – name all those credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors.

This article merely reflects a disagreement over the appropriate level of disclosure about past incidents of sexual misconduct. The reporters who wrote this story believe Crosiers should release more details. I will admit that this is a topic over which reasonable people can disagree. Unfortunately for the Crosiers, and for those who expect to read objective news coverage on the front page of the Star Tribune, the paper has allowed its reporters to use the front page as a vehicle to express their editorial judgment about what is the right level of disclosure for the Crosiers to make. If the Star Tribune believes the Crosiers (and presumably other religious denominations and institutions) should disclose more information, they have access to their own editorial page to raise that issue.

Misleads readers about relationship between parish and Crosiers.

The article states that Crosier “lack of candor threatens their credibility with some leaders of St. Odilia Church.” The story does not clarify whether the two individuals quoted were speaking as

individuals, speaking on behalf of all parish lay leaders, or expressing an official position of the parish. Even though the article notes the parish includes 11,000 members there is no indication that the reporters sought out the opinion of anyone – pastor, parish staff, other lay leaders, or parishioners – to indicate whether there was any other opinion that might be represented. In addition, the article does not identify any potential significant consequences from this difference. Moreover, the article mentions that both sides have agreed to participate in mediation, and that representatives of both sides express hope of a positive outcome from this process.

Tension in the Crosier – St. Odilia relationship, does not have widespread impact beyond the membership of the parish, and in itself, wouldn't merit coverage on page A1. In fact, the Star Tribune has otherwise set precedent through its editorial judgment that the scope of Crosier ministry and its work with St. Odilia Parish not only doesn't merit front-page coverage, but also doesn't merit any coverage. The Star Tribune ignored an invitation to cover the October 26, 2002 dedication of The Welcome Center, a joint ministry of the Crosier Community of Shoreview and the Parish of St. Odilia designed to serve the needs of recent immigrants. The dedication program featured a visit by retired Bishop Samuel Ruiz, from Chiapas, Mexico, an internationally acclaimed champion of human rights who was honored in Tokyo this year with the 2002 Niwano Peace Prize, and has been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize. The Star Tribune was offered an opportunity for a personal interview with Bishop Ruiz, but declined. The Star Tribune also ignored an opportunity to report on the formation of this joint Welcome Center Ministry in October 2001.

Allegation of “hidden” information about Gregory Madigan

Much of this article is focused around an allegation that the Crosiers have hidden information about Gregory Madigan’s past behavior from important groups of people. The specific group identified in the article is leaders of St. Odilia parish in Shoreview. The article, however, fails to state that the Crosiers have acknowledged that Greg Madigan did abuse children, and have publicly named him as one of their membership who committed abuse. Furthermore, the article nowhere explains how identifying the number of instances of suspected abuse will serve any public interest, let alone explain how this can be accomplished without inadvertently disclosing the identity of past victims who do not wish to be identified.

Moreover, the reporters do not disclose that allegations that Gregory Madigan abused boys at Holy Cross parish in Onamia, Minn., had been reported in the May 21, 2002 edition of the *Shoreview Press*, a community newspaper that is distributed to every household in Shoreview. While the Crosiers have not discussed details of Madigan’s past abuse in the news media, it is not fair to suggest that these allegations have been hidden from St. Odilia parishioners or parish leaders.

Further, the writers chose not to report work that the Crosiers did with parishioners of Holy Cross parish in Onamia to address Madigan’s past abuse. The reporters were aware of a listening session Father Tom Carkhuff, Crosier Prior Provincial, held at Holy Cross parish in June 2002. Here are two questions the reporters submitted to Father Carkhuff in preparation for this article, and Father Carkhuff’s responses:

Two of 22 follow-up questions to Father Tom Carkhuff, submitted November 19,

2002 by Dick Meryhew and Chris Graves. Responses submitted by Father Carkhuff on November 20, 2002

Question: We’ve been told that Father Carkhuff had a meeting with Holy Cross parishioners in Onamia in June to talk about the order’s handling of the abuse cases. Did you specifically talk about Madigan at that time? If so, what was context of the discussion? Was there any specific discussion about Madigan abusing altar boys? If so, what was said?

Answer: Yes, I invited Holy Cross parishioners to a listening session in June to discuss Crosier handling of sexual misconduct in the past. My primary purpose in conducting that meeting was to listen to parishioner reaction and concerns related to Greg Madigan’s past sexual misconduct that had been reported in the news media. We also provided parishioners with general information about sexual misconduct and how to report sexual misconduct. We invited anyone who has knowledge of sexual misconduct involving a Crosier to bring that knowledge forward to the Crosiers or to Faegre & Benson.

Question: We have been told that parishioners who attended the meeting were told not to discuss what was said. Is that true? If so, why? We also were told that it was specifically mentioned in advance that no media attend. Is that true? If so, why the request?

Answer: I believe we made a general request that people use the information they hear at the listening session in a way that respects the privacy of the individuals involved.

It was specifically mentioned at the meeting that members of the news media were not welcome to attend. These were listening sessions, and we believed that the free flow of information between parishioners and us would be hampered if parishioners knew everything that was said was likely to appear in the media.

Holding this listening session – as well as two listening sessions at St. Columba parish in May – demonstrates the Crosiers' willingness to address the issue of sexual misconduct in an open, forthright manner with the people directly concerned. Reporting this information in the article that was published would have given readers a more-balanced view of actions the Crosiers have taken to respond to sexual misconduct.



Crosier Fathers and Brothers