

## NEWS

# UPDATE: Former Bristol Community College professor on Providence Diocese's list of clergy 'credibly accused' of sex abuse

**Kiernan Dunlop** kdunlop@s-t.com

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FALL RIVER - When the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence released its [list of clergy “credibly accused” of sexually abusing minors](#) in July, it had ripple effects that made their way to the Southcoast.

On Aug. 22, the President of Bristol Community College, Dr. Laura Douglas, sent an email to students alerting them to the existence of the list and stated, “Included in the list was former Bristol Community College faculty member, John Tormey, who is no longer employed by the college.”

Her email went on to say, “Unfortunately, there was no way that the college could have been aware of this allegation, which dates back to 1979, prior to the disclosure being published by the Diocese in the media. When information such as this comes to the college’s attention, it is our duty to address the matter immediately and be as transparent as possible.”

The email never specifies if Tormey resigned, was fired, or retired.

Bristol's website lists Tormey, 77, as a Program Director of Thanatology, Gerontology, and Funeral Services and Professor of Psychology.

The college recognized Tormey for 40 years of service at a Recognition and Retirees Breakfast on May 11, 2018, according to an event description available on its website, which states that employees with 25 or more years of service are included in the Recognition Garden on the BCC Fall River Campus.

When reached for comment Tormey says Bristol Community College told him the publicity was tough to handle, "My option was, 'John why don't you retire and make this easy?' So I said yes. When this all happened here I was still recovering from open heart surgery and I didn't want any more aggravation."

In a statement he sent to colleagues Tormey called the email sent by Douglas "libelous" and told them, "I was never granted an interview by anyone at BCC to present my defense. I have an unblemished record of 42 years of integrity and respect at BCC."

Tormey said he was overwhelmed with the support from his colleagues that told him he had their friendship and support after he sent out the statement.

According to the list from the Providence Diocese, Tormey was ordained as a priest in 1967 and worked as one until he resigned from ministry on March 2, 1979. The list states the allegation was received after his resignation.

During his time as a priest, Tormey was assigned to two schools, St. Mary Bay View Academy in East Providence from 1970 to 1973, after which he took a five-month sabbatical, and St. Xavier Academy in Providence from 1974 to 1979, after which he resigned.

Tormey said he took the sabbatical to contemplate leaving the priesthood, but at first decided to return.

St. Mary Academy Bay View describes itself as an independent, Catholic school serving a diverse population of girls from preschool through grade 12.

The Standard-Times reached out to the school for comment but did not hear back.

In his statement to his colleagues, Tormey said the allegation against him came from 1973, while he was working at St. Mary Academy. "In 2003 a civil complaint was lodged against me from a 1973 incident by a 19 year old girl who I exposed to her parents for inappropriate behavior. The parents supported me until their death to the dismay of the complainant."

Tormey said his accuser said she talked to his pastor, "but my pastor was a straight shooting guy and he never mentioned anything to me about any type of abuse."

He went on to say that if his pastor had heard of abuse he never would have gone on to assign him to another all girls Catholic School, St. Xavier Academy.

St. Xavier Academy closed in 2001, according to the Diocese of Providence's Catholic Schools division, but an alumnae association website states, "In 1919, St. Xavier's became exclusively a high school for young ladies."

A recent post that comes up on a public Facebook group for the school contains comments from alumnae reacting to the news that Tormey was included on the list of accused clergy.

One commenter, Liza Bartlett, wrote "I was 16 when he was flirty with me and made me feel significantly uncomfortable on several occasions," and others wrote they were not surprised he was included in the list.

In response to these comments, Tormey said, "I was always kind of like the Joe Biden kind of guy, I was kind and nice. I have two thousand evaluations that say I was respectful, I don't know if she took it the wrong way...What's flirty mean? I was just nice and kind. They called Joe Biden flirty."

"In the Me Too movement any girl can say anything and you have to defend yourself," Tormey said, "I never touched her or did anything to her."

In addition to the schools, Tormey was assigned to Our Lady of Fatima Hospital in Providence for the summer of 1967, St. Margaret Church in Rumford from 1967 to 1973 (which has an associated school serving pre-k through grade 8 students), Blessed Sacrament Church in Providence for the summer of 1973, St. Maria Goretti Church in Pawtucket from 1973 to 1974, and St. Joseph Hospital in Providence from 1974 to 1979.

During this time a John C. Tormey published multiple books, including "Priests are Only Human" in 1973 and "Emotional Child Abuse" in 1979.

Dr. Ann Hagan Webb, a psychologist and member of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP, said that when the list came out in July, Tormey's name was one of 10 names that were new to the public.

The list included 50 names.

"It wasn't a name that they knew before or any of us knew before," Hagan Webb said referring to Tormey, "I don't know any of his victims."

However, Hagan Webb was quick to point out, "There are so many names that they didn't put on this list, that you'd have to be relatively certain that the ones that are on it are legitimate because [the Diocese of Providence]

testified in 2007 that they had files on 125 priests and there were only 50 priests on the list.”

The list was compiled by the diocese’s Office of Compliance, according to its website, and “The current director is Kevin M. O’Brien, a twenty-three year veteran of the Rhode Island State Police, a former Major and Commander of the Detective Division. The initial Director of Compliance, a retired Lieutenant of the Massachusetts State Police, served in that role for twenty-two years.”

When it came to determining who was credibly accused and should be included on the list, the website states, “For the purpose of the published list, the Director included individuals on the list when he had a reasoned and grounded belief that the allegation was sufficiently supported based upon the presently available and developed evidence.”

When reached for comment the diocese declined to comment on any specifics regarding the allegations against Tormey.

Tormey said the complaint against him was left in the diocese's archives, "and I was only notified 16 years later in the Spring of 2019. I was to defend myself and take a polygraph for justice on May 22. Unfortunately I had a major heart attack on May 19 with a 46-day hospital stay."

If he had been able to defend himself, Tormey said, he had witnesses who would have crushed the complaint.

Despite his saying he wasn't able to defend himself in the past, Tormey plans on defending himself going forward, "I have hired an attorney in the pursuit for justice and exoneration."

A search on John Tormey in the Rhode Island Judiciary Public Portal brings up two case files, one for a divorce from Jean Tormey filed in 1990 (which also listed his birth year) and another for a temporary restraining order

a Margaret Tormey filed for and was granted in 2003.

The Standard-Times reached out to the Rhode Island Attorney General's office about Tormey's criminal record and a spokesperson said, "We did not locate any records associated with this individual in Rhode Island."

More information is available about Tormey's career as an educator. He has a page on Rate My Professors, a website where anyone can give a professor an anonymous rating from 1 to 5, and with 63 reviews dating back to 2003, Tormey has a rating of 4.8.

The latest review is from May 21 of this year and says, "John is the best professor at BCC. He is caring and hilarious.... I finished the Thanatology Certificate with him and I'm honestly sad i wont [sic] have him again."

Most of the reviews are similarly positive, but one from 2012 that says he's an amazing professor also says, "If you are very sensitive and can't handle joking around dont [sic] take this course! He jokes with everyone including making fun of himself."

Another review says "DO NOT take his class if you're touchy about anything."

When reached for comment, Bristol spokesman Kevin Spirlet said they shared all the information they could in the email and any other information was kept private due to their employee privacy policy.

Spirlet did say when they learned of the list on July 1, they began to address the situation immediately.

They decided to share the information they could with students, Spirlet said, to reinforce the resources they have available to anyone in their college community.

In the email Douglas wrote, “As an educational institution, it is our mission to provide a respectful culture and prevent and address all forms of abuse and discrimination.”

The email then goes on to list services available in their college community which includes emergency contacts to the Community College Police, a Title IX officer, mental health counseling, and the Bristol Care Team, which accepts referrals for students who are experiencing challenges related to academic performance, wellness issues, and more.

The email from the Douglas also mentions how they will respond to Roman Catholic Dioceses in Massachusetts producing their own lists.

“In the coming months, dioceses throughout Massachusetts will begin publishing similar lists. We are not aware at this time whether anyone affiliated with the college will be on any of these lists, but we want to make sure that you have the information you need if necessary,” Douglas wrote.

By sending out the email to the BCC community, Tormey said, Douglas has breached a confidentiality agreement that he himself signed and honored, “They said ‘We’ll keep it quiet, confidential.’”

Tormey called the email “totally unnecessary” and said “there's a vindictiveness from [Douglas] that I feel is not necessary.”

When Tormey's presence on the list first came to the college's attention, Tormey said, “I asked them please sit down with me, I want to tell you my side of the story and they said no ... I never talked to the president, I talked to an Human Resources representative and they cut [the discussion] off right away, they didn't want to hear my side.”

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