

IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL TRIAL COURT
FOR THE DIOCESE OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

STANDING COMMITTEE OF
THE DIOCESE OF
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA,

Complainant

V.

THE REVEREND WALTER
THOMAS LECKRONE,

Respondent

PRESENTMENT

Pursuant to Canon IV. 3.1 and IV. 3.4, of the Canons of The Episcopal Church, the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Southwest Florida (“the Standing Committee”), through its duly authorized president, and following an affirmative vote of not less than a majority of all the members of the Standing Committee, as required by Canon IV. 3. 15 (a), taken at its regularly scheduled and duly convened meeting at the Dayspring Episcopal Conference Center, Ellenton, Florida, on May 4, 1998, hereby files this presentment against the Reverend Walter Thomas Leckrone, a priest (“Father Leckrone”), and charges as follows:

ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO
ALL COUNTS

1. Father Leckrone is now, and was at all times material to the acts described herein, a priest duly ordained in The Episcopal Church, and canonically resident in the Diocese of Southwest Florida. As such, Father Leckrone was subject to the canons of The Episcopal Church and of the Diocese of Southwest Florida, and was bound by his ordination vows taken by him in the Diocese of Southern Ohio at the time of his ordination to the priesthood in or about September 1970, and thereafter renewed by him in this diocese. Father Leckrone was at all such times a married man, fully subject to his marital vows. At present he is a resident of Farmville, Virginia, in the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

2. From approximately 1983 to a time in 1995, Father Leckrone served initially as vicar and later as rector of St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Hudson, Florida, a parish of the Diocese of Southwest Florida ("St. Martin's Church"). Upon retirement in 1995, Father Leckrone served as interim rector of Johns Memorial Church, Farmville, Virginia, in the Diocese of Southern Virginia ("Johns Church"), until October 1997. He then served as interim rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Marco Island, Florida, in the Diocese of Southwest Florida until he was temporarily inhibited from performing priestly service by the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese of Southwest Florida on or about February 19, 1998, in accordance with Canon IV. 1.2. He remains subject to this temporary inhibition, and to its possible extension.

3. Upon receipt of information from the Bishop of Southwest Florida, as provided in Canon IV. 3.5, the Standing Committee timely met and referred the matter for investigation by the Church Attorney, as provided in Canon IV. 3.11. This investigation was timely conducted by the Church Attorney and a report was made by him to the

Standing Committee as provided in Canons IV. 3. 12 and IV. 3. 13. This report has now been considered, and this presentment is accordingly made.

4. These actions of Father Leckrone hereafter described, collectively and separately, constitute immorality, or acts in violation of the ordination vows taken and renewed by Father Leckrone, or conduct unbecoming a member of the clergy, or some or all of the same, in violation of Canons IV. 1.1 (b), (h), and (j).

COUNT I

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH

██████████ T ██████████

5. Paragraphs 1 through 4, inclusive, are realleged.

6. During the time he was vicar and rector of St. Martin's Church, beginning in or about the late spring of 1990, and continuing at least until a time in 1993, Father Leckrone instigated and participated in a sexual and romantic relationship with ██████████ T ██████████ Ms. T ██████████ at all material times was a married female parishioner of St. Martin's Church, and was a person committed to the spiritual and pastoral care of Father Leckrone as a priest. The relationship included cunnilingus and fellatio, and manual and digital acts involving the genitals and involving the female breasts. These acts occurred at a time Father Leckrone knew Ms. T ██████████ was experiencing communication problems and emotional stress in her own marriage. As a result, Father Leckrone knew that Ms. T ██████████ was emotionally vulnerable to his advances.

COUNT II

IMPROPER AND INAPPROPRIATE CORRESPONDENCE WITH

██████████ T ██████████

7. Paragraphs 1 through 4, inclusive, and paragraph 6 are realleged.

8. During the relationship with Ms. T [REDACTED], Father Leckrone wrote and delivered to her more than thirty (30) handwritten letters of a sexual, seductive, and romantic nature. Each and all of the letters encouraged her to begin and continue the sexual relationship with him in violation of her own marital vows, or were of a lewd and obscene nature unbecoming a member of the clergy.

COUNT III

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH [REDACTED] W [REDACTED]

9. Paragraphs 1 through 4, inclusive, are realleged.

10. During the time he was vicar and rector of St. Martin's Church, and beginning in or about May 1992, and continuing at least until his retirement in 1995, Father Leckrone instigated and participated in a sexual and romantic relationship with [REDACTED] W [REDACTED], a married female parishioner of St. Martin's Church. Mrs. W [REDACTED] was at all material times a person committed to the spiritual and pastoral care of Father Leckrone as a priest. The relationship included vaginal intercourse, cunnilingus and fellatio, and manual and digital acts involving the genitals and involving the female breasts, and use of a vibrator purchased by Father Leckrone. These acts began during a time that Mrs. W [REDACTED] and her husband, [REDACTED], had sought pastoral counseling by Father Leckrone for emotional problems and stress in their own marriage. They continued during a time that Father Leckrone knew that Mrs. W [REDACTED] had been diagnosed as suffering from [REDACTED] [REDACTED], a painful and serious auto immune system disease. As a result, Father Leckrone knew that Mrs. W [REDACTED] was both physically and emotionally vulnerable to his advances.

COUNT IV

WRONGFUL SUGGESTIONS TO [REDACTED] W [REDACTED]
REGARDING HER SEXUAL IDENTITY

11. Paragraphs 1 through 4, inclusive, and paragraph 10 are realleged.

12. During the relationship, Father Leckrone, professing to be a counselor, but lacking appropriate credentials or professional training, in order to advance his own prurient desires, falsely and seductively suggested to Mrs. W [REDACTED] that she had a problem with her sexual identity and gender preference, and further suggested that she should have homosexual experience in his presence to assist her in resolving that issue. This action on his part created significant and unnecessary psychological stress for Mrs. W [REDACTED], requiring her to secure psychiatric advice to successfully resolve her doubts and to reaffirm her identity as a heterosexual person.

COUNT V

FALSE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION
TO THE CONGREGATION OF
JOHNS CHURCH

13. Paragraphs 1 through 4, inclusive, are realleged.

14. On or about April 23, 1998, Father Leckrone directed a letter to the members of the congregation of Johns Church, purportedly to inform these persons of his inhibition. and “to provide (them) with the truth of the matter.” (1st paragraph)

15. Inter alia, Father Leckrone in this letter stated:

(a) “So far, I have not been told, specifically, of what I have been accused.”
(4th paragraph)

(b) “The last word I received from anyone in the diocese (of Southwest Florida) was on March 3 (1998), when I was told that the complaint was to be investigated.” (4th paragraph)

(c) “For the record, I did not do anything that can be considered as sexual misconduct.” (5th paragraph)

16. Each of the quoted statements set forth in paragraph 15 (a) (b) and (c), supra, were collectively and separately false or misleading in that:

(a) Father Leckrone was specifically informed on or about February 19, 1998, by the Bishop of Southwest Florida of the allegations by Ms. T [REDACTED] and Mrs. W [REDACTED], at which time their written complaints (or copies thereof) were displayed to him. Further, his then counsel, Robert Williams, was fully briefed on the charges by the Church Attorney at the diocesan office in March, 1998, at which time the letters described in Count II were displayed to Mr. Williams, together with gifts given by Father Leckrone to Mrs. W [REDACTED], and yearbooks kept by Mrs. W [REDACTED] noting dates material to her relationship with Father Leckrone. The Church Attorney requested that Mr. Williams communicate the nature of this evidence to Father Leckrone. Thereafter, without disclosing the substance of any privileged conversation, Mr. Williams advised the Church Attorney that he had complied with this request.

(b) The meeting between the Church Attorney and Mr. Williams occurred after March 2, 1998.

(c) Father Leckrone committed the acts described in Counts I through IV, inclusive, which separately and collectively constituted sexual misconduct.

WHEREFORE, the Standing Committee brings this presentment and requests the Ecclesiastical Trial Court to summon Father Leckrone to answer the presentment, to

conduct a hearing on the charges set forth herein, to adjudge Father Leckrone guilty of each and all of such charges, to render an appropriate judgment of guilt, and thereafter to adjudge and impose a sentence of deposition, and to take such other action as may be right and proper.

Dated at Tampa, Florida, this 6th day of May, 1998.

The Standing Committee of
the Diocese of Southwest Florida

by Larry D. Hooper

The Reverend Larry D. Hooper
President
15102 Amberly Drive
Tampa, Florida 33647-1618

Thomas C. MacDonald, Jr.

Thomas C. MacDonald, Jr.
Counsel for the Standing Committee
The Florida Bar No. 049318
Church Attorney
Suite 2100
100 N. Tampa Street
Tampa, Florida 33602

Copies provided to:

The Rt. Rev. John B. Lipscomb
The Rt. Rev. Frank Vest
Murray B. Silverstein, Esq.
Ms. [REDACTED]
Mrs. [REDACTED]
Thomas C. MacDonald, Jr.