



The Episcopal Diocese of Texas  
1225 Texas Ave.  
Houston, TX 77002-3405  
713.520.6444  
Contact: Carol E. Barnwell  
[cbarnwell@epicenter.org](mailto:cbarnwell@epicenter.org)

## Timeline: The Rev. James L. Tucker Allegations

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas is committed to a thorough and transparent process in dealing with allegations of sexual misconduct brought against The Rev. James L. Tucker. This communication is part of our continuing effort to shed light on what we have discovered. Not surprisingly, we know more now about what transpired than we did a few short months ago when our investigative process began. These are the facts developed to date.

In the fall of 2005, at a St. Stephen's Episcopal School class reunion party, a story was told among several alumni about the Rev. James L. Tucker's sexual abuse of students, the secret reporting of it in 1968 by a group of students to then head of school, Dr. Allen Becker, and Tucker's subsequent dismissal from the school in 1968. The reason for Tucker's dismissal was not disclosed. Tucker was chaplain at the school from 1958 until 1968. Fred Myers, class of 1971, a former trustee and active advancement committee member, was part of that conversation. After confirming the story with another alumni participant, Myers took this information to the school's chairman of the board, Mike McKetta in April 2006, and then, as agreed with McKetta, to the head of school, the Rev. Roger Bowen in May of 2006. After further research and discussion with others, Bowen followed Diocese of Texas policy and notified the Bishop of Texas Bishop Don A. Wimberly during graduation weekend in May of 2006. The Bishop asked that Bowen speak with Canon C. Andrew Doyle, Canon to the Ordinary, and provide him with all the relevant information.

Canon Doyle received this information from Bowen in May 2006, and determined that an investigation should be commenced, as required by Diocesan policy. Praesidium, Inc., an independent firm, with experience in these types of matters, was hired to investigate the allegations. Their expert investigators spent weeks interviewing witnesses about events that occurred during Tucker's tenure.

Soon after beginning its investigation, Praesidium discovered at least three students had made complaints of sexual molestation against Tucker to the then head of school, Dr. Allen Becker.

From its investigation and interviews with former St. Stephen's students, Praesidium heard accounts of two reports. One former student, Bob Haslanger, said he spoke of Tucker's sexual abuse with Becker in a one-on-one disciplinary conference in 1966, but that Becker said he did not believe him. In the second report, two students, [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], mentioned their abuse by Tucker to several of their

classmates one spring evening in 1968. That same night, a group of students, which included ██████████ Abner Burnett and another student, since deceased, went to Becker's home in the early hours of the morning and confronted Becker with an account of sexual abuse by Tucker. The three former students, who are now in their 50s, recalled that Becker's first reaction was to say that he'd been expecting this for some time. The men, all members of the St. Stephen's class of 1970, reported that Becker went on to say he would take care of the matter, and that they should not tell anyone else what had happened, not even their parents. As instructed, they remained essentially silent about all this for almost 40 years.

When questioned about the incident, Becker told Canon Doyle that, while he did not recall any prior complaints, he did remember the night the students visited his home in 1968. Becker said he listened to their complaint about Tucker sexually abusing students and confirmed that he told the students he would take care of it. Becker removed Tucker from dorm duty, cancelled a trip to Africa that Tucker had planned with students, and told Tucker he would have to leave the school. Haslanger states that Tucker continued to abuse him until his graduation at the end of the 1968 school year.

Tucker left St. Stephen's Episcopal School a short time later, at the end of the school year. Becker explained Tucker's abrupt departure to others as a health issue. A thorough search of the Diocesan files failed to turn up any records related to Tucker or allegations of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, many who were with the Diocese at the time are now deceased. There is no information of what, if anything was communicated by Becker to then Bishop Milton Richardson (deceased) in 1968.

Following his dismissal from St. Stephen's Episcopal School, Tucker served as a hospital chaplain at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital in Houston from 1968 through 1969. In 1968, Tucker also began to conduct church services at St. James' Episcopal Church in Houston. In 1970, the parishioners at St. James' called Tucker to be their rector. Tucker served as rector at St. James' until his retirement in 1992. St. James' School (K-8) is a part of the St. James' Church ministry. Tucker then served briefly at Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church, Houston as an interim and fully retired in 1994.

Haslanger made a subsequent report in an interview with a school administrator in 1993, after receiving a communication from St. Stephen's Episcopal School that Tucker was being honored with a scholarship in his name and was being invited back to campus to work as a mentor to students. During the interview when Haslanger said he had been sexually abused while a student, it was the administrator who first brought up Tucker's name. The administrator gave Haslanger's report to then head of school, Fred Weissbach, detailing the abuse Haslanger had experienced while a student at St. Stephen's. The administrator then placed this information in Haslanger's school file, but there is no evidence that the complaint was reported to the Diocese or to anyone else in 1993. Haslanger states that he was told a few weeks later that there was no corroboration of his account or any other complaints of sexual molestation against Tucker. Tucker, however, was not given a role as student mentor as previously stated. In 1996 Haslanger was approached again by the school for a donation to the Tucker Scholarship and wrote to Weissbach. In 1996 Weissbach reported the letter and the

previous meeting with the administrator and Haslanger to then Bishop Claude E. Payne. The Diocese recently discovered these documents.

Praesidium completed its investigation in April 2007 and reported its findings to Bishop Wimberly. Praesidium's investigation detailed a pattern of abuse of three minor students by Tucker between 1964 through 1968 at St. Stephen's Episcopal School.

After a full review of the investigative reports done by Praesidium, Bishop Wimberly determined that the allegations of sexual abuse against Tucker were substantive, and immediately placed restrictions on Tucker. Bishop Wimberly inhibited Tucker from any practice of church ministry, informed Tucker of the ongoing investigation and of his rights, and provided a canonical advisor to him. Tucker later engaged legal counsel, and subsequent communications with Tucker were made through his attorney.

The Diocese reported the allegations of sexual abuse to the Travis County District Attorney and to the Houston Police Department and has cooperated fully with the authorities.

The Diocese also decided it was important to notify alumni of the allegations of sexual abuse, especially those whose school years coincided with Tucker's employment at the school. The decision was made to contact former students of St. James' School in Houston as well as parishioners. These actions were taken in an effort to determine if there were any other victims and to offer the Church's assistance.

In May and June of 2007, in cooperation with St. Stephen's and St. James', the Diocese informed faculty, staff and families of the sexual abuse allegations against Tucker. Additionally, letters were mailed to former students and families, notifying them of the allegations and inviting them to contact the Diocese or the police if they had experienced, or knew of someone else who had experienced, similar misconduct. As a result of these communications, the Diocese received reports from five additional former St. Stephen's students who alleged they were abused as minors or subjected to inappropriate sexual overtures by Tucker dating back to the 1962-63 school year. One of the reports was made by [REDACTED], who graduated from St. Stephen's in 1965, and who is a brother of [REDACTED], another victim. Some anonymous telephone calls reporting sexual abuse were received as well.

Canon Doyle was also contacted by one former St. James' student, who reported that Tucker had sexually abused him. This individual told Canon Doyle that he had made a complaint in 1994, shortly after Tucker retired, to Bishop Bill Sterling (deceased). He said he had been provided with counseling and given assurances that Tucker was no longer going to be allowed to function as a priest. The Diocese confirmed that Bishop Sterling, the bishop suffragan at the time, received the 1994 complaint and made arrangements for counseling for this victim. However, there are no records that Bishop Sterling ever reported the complaint to anyone else at the Diocese.

Much has been learned about sexual abuse in the last 40 years. By today's standards, the actions that were taken by the school and church in response to allegations of sexual abuse by Tucker would not be sufficient. The Diocese deeply regrets the abuse that occurred, as well as the missteps and missed opportunities to address, correct, and prevent the harm to the victims. Despite the passage of time, the Diocese has a moral and ethical obligation to seek out the truth, deal appropriately with past misconduct, and aid all who were hurt by Tucker's actions and the actions of the Church.

A number of victims have been willing to allow the Diocese to reveal their identities and share their contact information with the authorities in Austin and Houston who are investigating the incidents of sexual abuse. Some victims have elected to remain anonymous outside of the Bishop's office or declined to have their names turned over to the authorities. We have provided contact information for the police and the district attorney to all individuals reporting sexual abuse in the event they wish to notify the authorities directly.

Bishop Wimberly and Canon Doyle have personally contacted all of the former students who reported sexual abuse by Tucker and offered assistance, including the Church's apology for the harm that occurred. The Diocese will continue to make every effort to bring about healing and reconciliation.

There is also the issue of accountability, however. Bishop Wimberly has notified the Standing Committee for the Diocese of Texas of the results of the investigation into the allegations of sexual abuse by Tucker. The Bishop is following the protocol established under canon law. The Standing Committee has appointed a church attorney, who has reviewed the allegations and findings and is preparing a formal report for the Standing Committee. The Diocese anticipates that Tucker will be formally charged and subject to an ecclesiastical trial, unless he elects to submit a written acknowledgement of the charges against him and resign his ministry prior to that time.

While the Diocese deeply regrets what happened, it is determined to learn from the past, and has been proactive in developing policies and procedures to ensure that something like this will never happen again. Every person, clergy, employee, or volunteer, who works with or around children, is required to undergo training in a specially designed Diocesan program entitled, "Safeguarding God's Children." Over 19,000 individuals have been trained throughout the Diocese of Texas. In addition, there are strict rules in place for anyone with access to children, including a requirement that two or more unrelated adults be present at any activity involving children.

There are many who have been hurt by events in the past and the ensuing search for the truth, including the victims and Tucker's family. While some have criticized the Diocese for pursuing these decades-old allegations, the Church remains committed to its mission to seek justice, peace, and healing. It is the Church's fervent hope that this painful process will yield those results for all concerned.