

FLORIDA CBS AFFILIATE APOLOGIZES

On January 3, the CBS affiliate in St. Petersburg, Florida, WTSP, posted on its website a news story that read, "Former Sarasota Bishop Charged with Sexually Battering Child." It was about a former bishop at the Westcoast Center for Human Development in Sarasota; he was arrested and charged with battering a child.

We had no problem with that story. But we did have a problem with a similar story on this bishop that was posted the next day. It was titled, "'It's Disheartening': Former Catholic Church Abuse Victim Says Local Bishop Could Have More Victims."

In fact, there was no Catholic bishop charged with sexual abuse—it was the same Protestant bishop mentioned in the first story. The story began by stating that this bishop was "behind bars." Then—out of nowhere—it said that sexual abuse is happening across the country, citing a man who says he was abused 50 years ago by a Catholic priest.

The headline was totally dishonest. Furthermore, mentioning that a Catholic priest victimized someone a half-century ago was as gratuitous as it was scurrilous.

Something broke down. How could this CBS affiliate get it right the first day and then take cheap shots at the Catholic Church the next day—in a story unrelated to the bishop?

It would be like doing a story on a current reporter from a Sarasota newspaper charged with sexual misconduct, and then adding a story about a former WTSP reporter who was accused of a sexual offense 50 years ago, mentioning WTSP in the headline!

On January 6, we issued a news release addressing this matter. We are happy to report that after giving our readers the email address of Kelly Frank at WTSP, the station issued an apology. Here is the reply.

“After reading the headline and the story, we have added language to the headline and provided a clarification to make it clear that while the alleged victim we spoke to was a member of the Catholic Church, the Bishop in question represented a non-denominational church. We regret this omission and apologize for it.”

Good for WTSP. It is always better to remedy a wrong and apologize for making it than to stonewall your critics.

Thanks to all of those who made their voice heard. Unless you follow through, progress will not be made. We can't do this by ourselves.