



VENANGO REGION CATHOLIC SCHOOL

November 20, 2020

Dear VRCS families,

I am writing in regard to the front-page article about Michael O'Brien that appeared in *The Derrick* today. It is a heartbreaking story, and I know we are all reeling from details revealed in the charges. I am sure many of you are aware Mr. O'Brien served as principal at St. Stephen School for the 2017-2018 academic year. I want to assure you that the article was the first indication the school had of this situation.

He is facing very serious felony charges. I want to confirm that he passed all necessary background checks prior to his hiring, and that we thoroughly researched his credentials and references. They are all on file with the Catholic Schools Office and here at VRCS.

In addition, the school had no knowledge and had not received any reports of misconduct with students or other individuals, either during or after his time at St. Stephen School. Our decision not to renew his contract after that year was not in any way related to such behavior. That being the case, we will fully cooperate with law enforcement should we be called upon to do so.

The safety of your children remains our top priority. Please be assured that we follow a very thorough process when hiring all of our faculty and staff at VRCS. Every person must have an Act 168 Sexual Misconduct Release, a Pa. State Police Criminal History Record Check, a Pa. Child Abuse History Clearance, and an FBI Criminal History check that includes fingerprinting.

We are praying for the victim in this situation, as well as all who are suffering from sexual abuse. I know this is difficult news in a year when we have had more challenges than we could have imagined. It is in times like this that we truly rely on the faith we are working to impart to our children every day.

Perhaps you will find solace in David's prayer from Psalm 142:4, "When my spirit is faint within me, you know my path."

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mrs. Laura Blake".

Mrs. Laura Blake
President

Pastoral care and compassion for victims, as well as the protection of children and vulnerable adults, is a top priority of the Diocese of Erie. The diocese encourages anyone who has experienced sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy or any employee or volunteer of the church, to contact law enforcement. To report abuse to the independent investigators retained by the Diocese of Erie, email ErieRCD@KLGates.com. In addition, victims or concerned individuals can report abuse to ChildLine, an outreach of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, by calling 800-932-0313. The line is open 24/7, and callers may choose to remain anonymous. Victims also are welcome to contact the diocese directly to report abuse at 814.451.1543. Counseling assistance is available for victims and/or their families through the diocesan victim assistance coordinator, Dr. Gerard Tobin, who can be reached at 814.451.1521.