



SAINT MARY'S ABBEY

July 10, 2012

Dear Parents, Alumni and Friends of St. Mary's Abbey,

This has been another strong year for Delbarton and for our students in the classroom, in community service, in the arts and in athletics. However, it has also been a difficult one for our community, as individuals have come forward with new allegations of sexual misconduct going back as far as the 1970s. Please be assured that even prior to these recent allegations, Delbarton had already been working diligently with professionals for a decade to ensure that our community is free from any form of sexual abuse.

I write for three reasons: to reinforce the position of St. Mary's Abbey against sexual misconduct in all of its forms; to review the internal processes that we developed for the reporting and prevention of sexual misconduct; and to update you on recent steps I have taken as leader of the Abbey to build this system and ensure its continued readiness.

First, every individual in our community is created in the image of God and shares a common dignity before God. Sexual abuse and exploitation of any kind is inconsistent with this conviction and will not be tolerated. On behalf of my predecessors and our entire monastic community, we are firmly committed to eradicating any form of sexual abuse in our community. We are hopeful and confident that the changes implemented over the last several years will lead to this result. To those who have been abused, I wish to express the profound depths of our sorrow, both as leaders and as children of God.

Our code of conduct is spelled out in detail in the Abbey Ethics Policy, which binds all members of our monastic community. Every monk has personally signed on to it. I encourage anyone who believes this policy has been violated to bring it to my attention.

Second, I am strongly committed to our existing approach, which emphasizes accountable procedures to prevent sexual misconduct and address it swiftly and authoritatively wherever it may have occurred. As I wrote to our parents in greater detail last fall, all staff are required to undergo significant and continuous training in identifying and reporting potential abuse. In the event of a complaint, we cooperate fully with the relevant authorities and follow specific internal steps to evaluate the situation and take appropriate action. It is important to note, however, that if a prosecutor's office is reviewing a matter, we hold the internal evaluation in abeyance until the prosecutor has completed his or her review.

One point that is commonly misunderstood is the critical role of independent, third-party expertise in creating and evaluating both prevention and response protocols. Our training, reporting and prevention programs have completed several rigorous evaluations by Praesidium, Inc., a highly-esteemed, independent professional organization in child protection that works on behalf of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. We were accredited by Praesidium, which conducts its reviews every three years, as an institute "Safe for Children" in June 2008, and again in July 2011. We have adopted and implemented the best practices proposed by Praesidium.

When misconduct is alleged or suspected, independent evaluation is entrusted to the Abbey Review Board. This body operates in complete independence from the Abbey, providing an unbiased assessment of the facts of each complaint. To reinforce its independent role, the Review Board members do not come from our own alumni, parents of alumni, or related ministries of the Abbey.

The Abbey Review Board includes a former New Jersey State Supreme Court justice, well-known attorneys in the state, a psychologist and victims' rights professional, a canon lawyer, and a social worker with relevant expertise. These individuals take whatever time is necessary to ensure a comprehensive review. I am grateful for their tireless commitment and rely heavily on their professional experience and impartial judgment.

Indeed, I am grateful for the hard work that so many have done to strengthen our community and keep it safe. As our protocols and procedures have grown, we have reached the point where a professional structure can help us manage our various prevention and training programs, coordinate our response to complaints, and maintain a comprehensive culture of safety. To that end, I have appointed an independent official from the lay community to assist us. I will rely on this individual to help manage our internal response to specific cases as well as the pastoral outreach to alleged victims.

I have also engaged a victim's rights advocate to serve as an intermediary between an accuser and the Abbey. In addition, we have two independent and professional lay victim supervisors working for us in order to assist with internal matters. Moreover, while we do not expect to go through Praesidium accreditation again until 2014, I have asked officers from Praesidium to visit us this summer or fall to re-evaluate all the measures we have taken, both before our two accreditations within the last ten years and most recently. I pray that all of these measures will foster an environment free of any type of sexual misconduct.

We are moving as rapidly as possible with respect to the resolution of these cases. However, I must stress that there are many factors in the process that we cannot control. We will be diligent at every step, taking into consideration the rights of both the victims and the accused Monks. We are confident that we will come through this process stronger and more respectful of the duty we owe to one another as men, women and children born in the image and likeness of God.

As many of you know, our recent challenges, as well as our continued endeavors to improve, have come at a difficult time for me personally. Through the excellent work of my doctors, I was able to recover fully after being hospitalized with double pneumonia in January and February. After several weeks in our infirmary, I resumed most of my priestly duties and responsibilities as Abbot in mid-April. I thank you for your prayers; you remain in mine.

Finally, the urgent administrative steps we continue to take must never overshadow the compassion we owe to those who have been victims of abuse. To those who have confided in me their concerns and their personal hurt, I pledge my renewed vigilance and keep you in my prayers. To those who have not, and to those who in many cases feel victimized anew whenever the subject is broached, please know that it is for you that we continue to build on what we have learned to make our community safer and stronger.

My door remains open to each of you. Never hesitate to reach out to me with any concerns or matters of interest you wish to discuss with me or have questions about. You are always in my prayers.

Sincerely yours,



Rt. Rev. Giles P. Hayes, O.S.B.
Abbot