



## A Letter to the Delbarton Community



Abbot Richard Cronin, OSB and Headmaster Michael Tidd, OSB  
Jul 20 2018



*On July 20, Abbot Richard Cronin, OSB and Headmaster Fr. Michael Tidd, OSB sent the following letter to all members of the Delbarton community:*

July 20, 2018

Dear Members of the St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School Community,

In recent weeks, several news stories have appeared regarding litigation alleging sexual abuse by monks of St. Mary's Abbey. We write to you today because we believe it is important to address these issues with you directly and forthrightly.

Specifically, we want you to know how St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School have responded to these allegations of abuse, the status of litigation on these matters, and what we are doing today to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all members of our community.

Above all, we want you to understand that protecting the well-being of the students of Delbarton and all those to whom we minister is our highest and most important priority. To that end, we have implemented the best practices summarized below and in the attached appendix to protect our students and all others whom we serve.

### **Allegations of Abuse at Delbarton and St. Mary's Abbey, and Our Response**

- Since 1988, thirty individuals (former Delbarton students, sons of a former Delbarton School employee, a parishioner at St. James Church in Basking Ridge and former students of St. Elizabeth of Hungary School in Linden) have courageously stepped forward to say that between 1968 and 1999 they were sexually abused by thirteen present or former monks from St. Mary's Abbey and one retired lay faculty member.
- We take these accusations very seriously, and we profoundly regret and apologize to anyone who has suffered sexual abuse or harassment because of the actions of a St. Mary's Abbey monk or Delbarton School employee.
- Our hearts are full of compassion for the victims of sexual abuse, and we applaud the courage of those who have had the strength to step forward and speak about their experiences.
- As St. Mary's Abbey officials learned of abuse allegations, those individuals who were still Abbey monks (four of the accused men had left the monastic community in the 1970s or early 1980s, before accusations were made) were removed from their ministerial positions. They were barred from unsupervised contact with minors and had their activities and movements regulated by Abbey officials.
- As progressively improved best-practice standards of child protection developed, they were adopted by Abbey officials. These standards required stricter monitoring of accused monks and clearer policies for responding to abuse victims and preventing abuse among children and vulnerable adults. These

best practice standards of child protection remain in place today at Delbarton School and St. Mary's Abbey (see below).

- Abbey officials also immediately notified the Morris County Prosecutor's Office as each allegation emerged. The Abbey and School then undertook independent investigations of the allegations after the Prosecutor's Office indicated whether it would prosecute the allegations as crimes. In all but one case, criminal charges were not filed. We continue to work closely with the Morris County Prosecutor, as detailed below.
- Eight of the civil actions brought against the Abbey and School since 2012 have been settled, and seven cases are pending. In settling these claims, no restrictions have been placed on the victims' ability to discuss their experiences. This is consistent with our belief that transparency may help the victims in their healing and help our community and broader society in preventing this from happening again.
- The payments for these settlements have been provided for by insurance coverage, and no donations to the School or Abbey, past or present, restricted or unrestricted, have been, or will be, used for settlements.

### **Protecting the Safety and Well-Being of Our Students Today**

Today at St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School, we have robust policies and procedures, regularly reviewed by independent third-party experts, to ensure a safe and protective environment for our students and all to whom we minister.

To begin, we apply comprehensive policies and procedures for child protection to all monks and lay employees, including detailed evaluations, fingerprinting, and background checks of any candidates for the monastery and for employment at Delbarton School or St. Mary's Abbey. We also conduct annual training programs for all monks and employees of the Abbey and School on abuse prevention and informed responsiveness to claims of sexual abuse and harassment. These policies and procedures are regularly evaluated and often strengthened as society continues to learn more about the dynamics of abuse and harassment.

To assist students in recognizing and responding appropriately to potential abusive behaviors, in 2018-19, Delbarton School plans to implement a child safety webinar for all students. We also will incorporate safety skills instruction, including abuse-related education, into the Middle School health curriculum in 2018-19.

To ensure that our policies and their application meet the highest standards of child safety protection, we chose to have all of our abuse prevention policies and procedures regularly audited by Praesidium, an outside compliance and risk management agency dedicated to promoting child protection in both religious and secular institutions. Praesidium (<https://website.praesidiuminc.com/wp/>) is recognized as the premier standard for child protection policy development and compliance monitoring in the United States and abroad. Abbot Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B., a monk of St. Mary's Abbey and Abbot President of the American Cassinese Congregation of Benedictine Monasteries, is a member of the Board of Directors of Praesidium.

St. Mary's Abbey is fully accredited by Praesidium as compliant with all aspects of their child safety protocols and the requirements of the 2002 Dallas Charter for the prevention of child sexual abuse adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Delbarton School will complete a separate full Praesidium accreditation in the 2018-19 academic year.

Along with strong safe environment policies and practices, we also now have on staff at Delbarton a licensed psychologist (Dr. Matthew D'Urso, Dean of Guidance) with specialized training in the treatment and evaluation of children with trauma histories. Dr. D'Urso is currently completing additional advanced training through Praesidium as a "Certified Praesidium Guardian," to become an expert in organizational abuse prevention.

In addition, St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School strictly adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in the enclosed document for handling claims of sexual abuse or harassment against any current or past monk or lay employee.

### **Reporting Abuse**

We strongly encourage anyone affected by the alleged sexual transgressions of those affiliated with St. Mary's Abbey or Delbarton School—no matter how long ago—to please inform us and/or law enforcement. We understand that coming forward with allegations of sexual abuse can be incredibly difficult, yet it is critically important in promoting healing for those abused and accountability for abusers.

To report a claim of sexual abuse or harassment, the St. Mary's Abbey Case Management Office may be reached at 973-538-3235, extension 2058. Alternatively, we invite any of our parents, alumni, students or parishioners to make known to Abbot Richard Cronin, O.S.B., Fr. Michael Tidd, O.S.B., Headmaster, Mr. Charles Ruebling, Assistant Headmaster, or Dr. Matthew D'Urso, Dean of Guidance, any sexual abuse or harassment that he or she has suffered. To reach Father Michael or Mr. Ruebling, please call 973-538-3231. To reach Abbot Richard, please call 973-538-3235.

### **A Commitment to Our Community**

Vigilantly protecting the safety and welfare of Delbarton students, and all whom the monks of St. Mary's Abbey and the faculty and staff of Delbarton serve, is at the forefront of everything we do. Nothing is more important to us as we seek to uphold the trust you place in us.

We hope that this letter has helped to address questions you may have and gives you assurance that we are committed to the safety of all who call Delbarton home. If you would like more information about any of the points made in this letter, please feel free to contact either of us at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

*Rev. Richard Cronin, OSB*

Abbot Richard Cronin, O.S.B.

Abbot, St. Mary's Abbey

richard@delbarton.org

973-538-3235, ext. 3001

*Fr. Michael Tidd, O.S.B.*

Father Michael Tidd, O.S.B.

Headmaster, Delbarton School

michael@delbarton.org

973-538-3231, ext. 3020

**St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School Policies and Procedures  
for Handling Allegations of Abuse or Harassment by a Benedictine Monk or Lay Employee**

- As soon as St. Mary's Abbey or Delbarton School receives an accusation of sexual abuse by a monk or lay employee of either St. Mary's Abbey or Delbarton School, we immediately;
  - Notify the Morris County Prosecutor's Office. The Morris County Prosecutor's staff investigates the accusation and determines whether a crime may have been committed and whether the accused should be criminally charged.
  - Offer the accuser funding for professional counseling and provide pastoral outreach to the accuser and his or her family.
  - Apply a plan for an accused monk that includes numerous restrictions on their activities and movement until their case is resolved. The accused monk is immediately removed from all pastoral activities and may not have unsupervised contact with minors or vulnerable adults.
  - Suspend lay employees of the Abbey or School from their duties, and prohibit any unsupervised contact with students or vulnerable adults
- After the investigation by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, and if there is no criminal charge, St. Mary's Abbey or Delbarton School conducts an independent investigation of the allegation. For monks, this investigation includes an oversight committee appointed by the Abbot, the Abbey Review Board, made up of law enforcement, child safety and religious professionals unrelated to St. Mary's Abbey or Delbarton School. Until that final determination happens, the accused monk remains on a supervision plan overseen by Abbey officials, and the accused monk has no unsupervised contact with minors or public ministry of any kind.
- If there is a criminal charge, St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School cooperate fully with the appropriate prosecutor's office until the legal process concludes.
- After a thorough investigation, the Abbey Review Board provides the Abbot with recommendations regarding the disposition of the case and the future status of the accused monk. A similar process is followed regarding the disposition of a case against a lay employee of the Abbey or School.
- St. Mary's Abbey and Delbarton School alert all individuals or organizations associated with the accused, but the accuser's identity remains confidential. We follow this process until the case is resolved.
- To report a claim of sexual abuse or harassment, the St. Mary's Abbey Case Management Office may be reached at 973-538-3235, extension 2058. Alternatively, please call Abbot Richard Cronin, O.S.B., Fr. Michael Tidd, O.S.B., Headmaster, Mr. Charles Ruebling, Assistant Headmaster, or Dr. Matthew D'Urso, Dean of Guidance. To reach Father Michael, Mr. Ruebling, or Dr. D'Urso, please call 973-538-3231. To reach Abbot Richard, please call 973-538-3235