



St. Ignatius of Loyola Church

5222 North Bend Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45247 • 513.661.6565 • sainti.org

December 2, 2021

Dear Members of the St. Ignatius Community:

We write to you today to share the news that Father Geoff Drew, who served as pastor of St. Ignatius of Loyola Church from July 2018-August 2019, accepted a plea agreement in which he pleaded guilty to nine counts of rape and received a sentence of seven years in prison (with credit for time already served) followed by five years' probation and lifetime registered sex offender status. These offenses occurred when Father Drew was a lay music teacher at St. Jude School, not here at St. Ignatius. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati will now seek laicization of Father Geoff Drew with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith at the Holy See.

We at St. Ignatius promised to communicate any news to you in a timely and accurate manner. Without wanting to revive the trauma caused at St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish more than two years ago, we offer a brief summary here. Father Geoff Drew was placed on administrative leave on July 23, 2019 as a result of a pattern of behaviors – such as boundary violations and texting a minor – in contradiction to the *Decree on Child Protection*. Subsequent to being placed on administrative leave, Father Drew was arrested and charged with nine counts of rape. These were new, previously unreported allegations dating back to the late 1980s, more than a decade before he began formation for the priesthood. Information previously released about this matter can be found on the website of the archdiocese: <https://resources.catholicaoc.org/communications/news/fr-geoff-drew-information>.

As our parish and school community continue to heal, we must acknowledge that a great impediment to evangelization has been the clergy sexual abuse scandal in our Church. The inconsistency between the message of Jesus and the duplicity of some Church members, especially the clergy, has damaged the Church's credibility and the people's trust in the Church. We must acknowledge the horrific suffering of those who have been abused, remain vigilant in rooting out and preventing abuse, and pray for continued healing. People will have a great deal of difficulty in following Jesus and His message unless they can be persuaded once more to listen to His messengers. Our efforts to evangelize, even here at St. Ignatius, have been hampered by the crisis.

While this news may bring closure for some in our community, for others it may evoke feelings of mistrust and doubt. We cannot undo what happened here more than two years ago. We cannot defend the indefensible or deny this case was mishandled. Our course of action here at St. Ignatius Church and School and in our Archdiocese must be one of continued vigilance and improvement to protect our young people.

Over the past two years, there are some things that we and the Archdiocese have done and must continue to do differently. For its part, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati has implemented a

number of major policy changes. For example, there will no longer be any monitored or restricted priests; the same policy now applies to both clerics and lay employees with respect to conduct. Two lay people, with expertise in human resources, were appointed as advisors to the Priest Personnel Board to give better insight into the background and profile of the priest to be assigned. All Archdiocesan employees, without exception, have been designated as mandatory reporters and must report in writing. The Archdiocese has created an Ethics and Conduct Review Team, which meets biweekly against a cleric, lay employee, or volunteer, to evaluate and track allegations of misconduct pertaining to Safe Environment and the Decree on Child Protection — in real time. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati today renewed its commitment to creating and maintaining safe environments, including enforcing the *Decree on Child Protection* without compromise.

At the parish level, we are convinced that we have an extremely secure campus. Angie Heisel, our Assistant Principal, monitors things carefully at the school, while Emily Branscum, our Youth Minister, monitors compliance with the Child Protection Decree on the parish side. Our campus is furnished with cameras to monitor any behavior that would threaten children. As reported in the parish bulletin in April, our parish passed its Safe Environment audit with flying colors. We have established a Parish Safe Environment Committee. We have also highlighted National Abuse Prevention Month, with videos and other resources, including *Ethics Point* and the Catholic Bishops Abuse Reporting System, when dereliction of duty or abuse is suspected.

Throughout the past two years, we have also held Holy Hours of Reparation in the hopes that healing may come to victims. Each Thursday, there is Eucharistic Adoration in church until 7 PM, with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a sacrament of healing, available from 5-7 PM. We invite you to join us for silent prayer, particularly for all those who have suffered sexual abuse, especially at the hands of members of the Church. In particular, we invite you to pray for the continued healing of the particular person who was harmed and who brought these charges. The Lord also invites us to pray for our parish, for Father Drew and his deeper conversion to Christ, and for the grace to be able to forgive.

St. Ignatius of Loyola is a community where people of faith worship and act together as a body. We must, by word and example, confront our challenges and overcome them with the strength that comes from Jesus Christ and His Gospel. During this Season of Advent, we sing, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” which means God is with us. He is always with us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Father Earl K. Fernandes, Pastor



Mr. Kevin Vance, Principal