

A Message from the Pastor of St. Isidore the Farmer Parish Regarding a Safe Environment for All God's Children

The Legend of the Three Companions is one of the earliest accounts of the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. According to the *Legend*, Saint Francis once told his earliest followers:

“The brothers’ way of life among the people should be such that whoever hears or sees them glorifies and praises the heavenly Father with dedication.’ For his great desire was that he, as well as his brothers, would abound in such good deeds for which the Lord would be praised. He used to tell them: ‘As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that the greatest peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness, and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring.

The above has always been among the most meaningful of passages for me and was proclaimed at my First Profession as a Capuchin-Franciscan friar. A different translation of St. Francis’ final admonition to his brothers in this passage, “We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way” has served as my personal mission statement throughout my Capuchin life.

In that spirit, I would like to reaffirm my absolute commitment to ensuring that St. Isidore the Farmer Parish is a safe environment for all God’s children. I know that some wish that this would just go away. Unfortunately, as long as there is a need to “heal the wounded, bind up the broken” it is not something that we as a Church can or should ignore. The sexual abuse of children is a sin and a crime that sadly can be found throughout our society. Therefore, as pastor, and with an awareness of our parish’s history, I would like to share with you a excerpt from the **Capuchin Province of St. Joseph’s Statement of Policies and Practices in Response to Sexual Misconduct and Abuse**.

“As brothers of St. Francis of Assisi, the friars of the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph reverence all creatures, especially children who hold a special place in God’s affection...The province’s Misconduct Policy and its practices covering effective responses to allegations, reconciliation, accountability, and the protection of children and youth in provincial ministries have been reviewed and updated. We know that there have been times when children and youth entrusted to our care have been harmed. We acknowledge that sexual abuse of a minor is a crime. We apologize to those who have been abused by one of our friars...we are committed to decisively responding to any instance in which our brothers have abused the trust that others have placed in them and us. We are committed to working hard to restore that trust as the wisdom, grace, and justice of God directs us to do.”

More complete information, including how to make a report to the civil authorities, can be accessed on the Safe Environment websites of the Province of St. Joseph or the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Either can be accessed by clicking the links at the top of this page.

Our Church has made much progress in recent years to acknowledge past abuse, hold accountable those who perpetrated the abuse, and reach out with compassion to victims and survivors. That we fell far short of this in the past is a part of our legacy. We cannot undo what has happened. I know that my Capuchin Province is committed to doing better now and in the future. As a parish community we can work together to ensure that all God’s children are safe in our church and school. Let us pray that all sectors of our society will address the very real scourge of child abuse so that future generations will be spared.

Peace and all good,
Fr. Gary Wegner, OFM Capuchin
Pastor