

St. Barnabas Catholic Parish
A people called to proclaim The Good News



May 5, 2015

Dear Parents and Families,

I am writing to assure you that your children are not only God's gift to you; they are God's gift to our parish family as well. I want to assure you that the safety of your children is a high priority here at St. Barnabas. Thank you for entrusting your precious children to us.

St. Barnabas fully supports and complies with all the safe environment requirements outlined by the Diocese of Cleveland. All clergy, staff and volunteers are trained in VIRTUS; submit to a fingerprint background check; and read the required documents, including the *Policy for the Safety of Children in Matters of Sexual Abuse: Revised 2007*. We will continue to implement all the procedures that safeguard our children.

Further, we will not tolerate any infraction of these safe boundaries. In fact, if you know of even the slightest hint of inappropriate activity involving our children in the school, PSR, or parish-sponsored activity, I urge you to report it to me and to the proper authorities.

This topic has come to the fore recently due to news coverage about a parish family member. You may be aware that Mr. Steve Bittel, who served both our parish school and PSR programs as catechist, has pled guilty to criminal charges of being involved with internet child pornography. He was recently sentenced to 14 years in prison and has begun serving his term. As your pastor, I ask you to pray for him and for all those involved in this tragic situation, especially those children and vulnerable adults who are exploited by the pornography industry.

In the meantime, it has come to my attention that some parishioners have questioned the wisdom of my providing a letter of support to Mr. Bittel in the sentencing phase of his legal proceeding. In my letter, I stated the facts of Mr. Bittel's involvement in parish life and asked that the Judge consider this in the sentencing decision. In no way did I condone the base charges or offenses for which Mr. Bittel had already been convicted. I regret deeply any interpretation that I would condone such behavior and I am sorry for the confusion.

If you have any questions or concerns, I invite you to reach out to me directly at any time. Again, thank you for the gift of your children in our parish.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Fr. Ralph". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Fr. Ralph E. Wiatrowski
Pastor