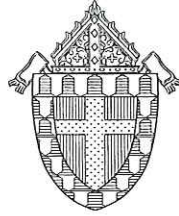


Roman Catholic Diocese of Lafayette



Information Release

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To: Community of Sacred Heart School and Local Media

Over the past few years, complaints concerning the operation of Sacred Heart School have been directed to Bishop Michael Jarrell. Bishop Jarrell served as Pastor of Sacred Heart Church for many years. He is aware of the importance of the School to the community of Ville Platte and the surrounding area. For over eighty years families have entrusted their children to the School.

In a letter released to the Sacred Heart School family, on May 14, 2015, Bishop Jarrell has judged that since the community is divided about the School, outside assistance is warranted in resolving the community's difference.

The Bishop acknowledged that many members of the faithful have loved the school; they have contributed time, talent and treasure to assure its effectiveness, its growth, and its vitality.

In every school, there are challenges and disagreements. In particular, the position of Principal is often the focus of many such disagreements. It is not an easy role to fulfill, and it is impossible to please everyone.

While some parents and alumni are complaining about the current principal, Mrs. Diane Fontenot, and even demanding her removal, she does enjoy a significant measure of support. The last two Pastors, Father Gene Tremie, and Father Joshua Guillory, as well as the current Pastor, Father Jason Vidrine, all speak well of her and support her. The Diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools supports her. The Bishop received numerous positive letters from parents, faculty and alumni. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in its AdvancED external evaluation in January of 2014 gave the school a favorable rating. It specifically noted that *"[t]he major focus of the school has been to strengthen the religious formation of the students and to provide a quality academic education in the context of a Christian milieu...All stakeholder groups affirmed the Catholic culture that exists on the campus...Roman Catholic values permeate the campus."* Many of the current faculty members understand her vision for excellence and support her leadership.

The Bishop noted that most of the dissent which was brought to his attention has been passionate but respectful. He did, however, condemn the two acts of vandalism that were brought to his attention—the breaking of vehicle windows and the writing of graffiti, especially vulgarities. The actions are unacceptable behavior. These destructive acts must be condemned by everyone. Similarly, offensive or hurtful words communicated over social media are not only uncharitable but also erode the legitimacy of one's heartfelt opinion.

After much thought, prayer and consultation, Father Vidrine and Bishop Jarrell are putting in motion the following action plan:

1. A Blue Ribbon Committee of disinterested individuals will be formed to conduct an inquiry; they will hear from all interested parties. The committee will make recommendations to Father Vidrine. It is the Bishop's hope that this could be accomplished by June 30th. The most important findings of the Committee will be made public.
2. Principal Diane Fontenot will cooperate fully with the committee and is willing to comply with the recommendations of the committee provided they are approved by the Pastor and me.
3. The committee will also address several contentious issues that have arisen over the years:
 - a. The role and function of the School Advisory Council
 - b. The role and function of the Sacred Heart Athletic Booster Club
 - c. The role and function of the Sacred Heart School Foundation

The Bishop noted the necessity that all policies and practices of the Diocese of Lafayette must be followed in every detail. In the meantime the Bishop encourages patience and a peaceful spirit among all in the community. He noted that that Scriptures remind us that charity is the outward sign of faith. In fact, the depth of faith is measured by our ability to love even in the face of disagreement.

The Bishop believes that within the present crisis there is a vital opportunity. Bishop Jarrell reminded everyone that SHS has faced crises in the past. The school community has always used the occasion to move forward in a positive way. Bishop Jarrell is hopeful that, in the spirit of dedication the school community will do so again. The Bishop prayed for everyone that the Lord may prosper the work of our hands.

May 14, 2015

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The above information is being released via emails to parents and on the School and Diocesan websites.