



Office of the Archbishop

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington

Post Office Box 29260, Washington, DC 20017-0260

Wednesday 17 July, 2024

Dear Annunciation Parish and School Community,

I am writing to update you on the status of your pastor, Monsignor Michael Mellone. You may recall that when the Maryland Child Victims Act took effect on October 1, 2023, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington received a lawsuit that included allegations of sexual abuse of a minor made by a John Doe plaintiff against Monsignor Mellone and Deacon Lawrence Bell that dated back to the 1990s, when they served together at Saint Martin of Tours Catholic Church and School in Gaithersburg. To be clear, apart from the lawsuit, we have received no prior complaints of any sort of improper conduct made against either Monsignor Mellone or Deacon Bell — at any time or at any place.

Following the requirements of Canon Law and our protocols, we immediately reported these allegations to law enforcement, and both men were removed from active ministry as a precautionary measure, pending further investigation. I appointed a temporary administrator and took other steps to care for the needs of the parish. The parish community was informed about all of these actions, and we cautioned that the precautions taken with respect to Monsignor Mellone and Deacon Bell should not be interpreted as any sort of judgment about the truth or falsity of the allegations, or about Monsignor Mellone, Deacon Bell, or the person who has made the allegations.

We shared the information that we had at the time with the parish community, and I promised to keep you updated. After making the required reports to law enforcement, the Archdiocese was subsequently informed that neither Montgomery County nor the State of Maryland was pursuing a criminal investigation of the allegations made in the lawsuit. In accordance with the requirements of Canon Law, I initiated a Preliminary Investigation, a process that entails an investigation of the facts and circumstances related to the allegations, so that I may determine the next steps regarding their future ministry. To assist with the canonical investigation, an experienced investigative firm was retained to gather any available evidence, and all parties were given an opportunity to participate. After a thorough investigation, the findings were recently presented to me, and I shared these findings with our Child Protection and Safe Environment Advisory Board, a group mainly comprised of lay people who have expertise in these matters.

After careful review and consultation, I have not seen any evidence that supports the allegations made in the John Doe lawsuit. Nor are there any other past instances of alleged misconduct involving either Monsignor Mellone or Deacon Bell. Accordingly, I have made the determination to lift the precautionary restrictions that had been placed on Monsignor Mellone and Deacon Bell, effective immediately, so that both men may return to active ministry. This matter could be revisited in the future if the circumstances change or if new information becomes available that would necessitate further review.

I recognize that this process has taken a toll on Monsignor Mellone and the Annunciation parish community. I will be visiting your parish to concelebrate the Vigil Mass on Saturday, July 27, 2024, and I also ask that a copy of this letter be read at all Masses one weekend and posted on the parish website.

In this difficult time, I ask for you to welcome back Monsignor Mellone as your pastor, and I also ask for your continued prayers for Monsignor Mellone and Deacon Bell, for John Doe, and for all the impacted communities.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



✠ Wilton Cardinal Gregory,
Archbishop of Washington