

St. Francis by the Sea Catholic Church
45 Beach City Road
Hilton Head Island, S.C. 29926

October 23, 2018

Dear Parishioners:

In prudence, I feel it necessary to inform you of information that has become public, which still requires sensitivity to the source of the allegation, potential victims of the allegation, and the presumption of innocence of our current Youth Minister, Mr. Hector Morales, who has denied the allegations.

On Monday, October 15th at approximately 1:30 p.m., Mr. Morales was charged with two counts of criminal sexual conduct with a minor 11 -14 years of age. From the start, this has been, and remains, a criminal investigation that did not begin with a report to our Parish or Diocese. The Parish or Diocese has not been contacted by any legal agencies for any additional information.

On Tuesday morning, October 16th, an e-mail and registered letter was sent to Mr. Morales putting him on Administrative Leave and that all Church property (which included the Youth Group computer and all keys to Church property) were to be collected. Mr. Morales has no access to our campus until further information has been relayed to the Parish or Diocese on these charges. On Wednesday morning, October 17th, the keys and computer were collected.

On Saturday, October 20th and Sunday, October 21st, a public statement was released and read at all the masses at Holy Family. This format was a draft and did not have final approval at St. Francis and was still being worked on by the lawyer, but the following information is pertinent:

“Mr. Morales-Pratts has been working at St. Francis by the Sea since May 1, 2016. Mr. Morales-Pratts passed a criminal history screen, signed a code-of-conduct, signed an acknowledgement of our policy and completed sex abuse prevention education before he was permitted to work with our youth.

Please be aware that Louisa Storen, the Victim Assistance Coordinator for the Diocese, is available for counseling assistance and guidance should you or anyone in your family need her. She can be reached at (800)921-8122”

I, of course, have been in constant communication with the Diocese these past 7 days and talked with Mr. Morales, our principal, Brian Pope, our current and past Safe Environment Coordinator, Colleen Rzczycki and Mitzi Weaver, and Deacon Vernon Dobelmann, our current Director of Religious Education, to try to assess if there is anything that we were aware of that would have been inappropriate behavior by Mr. Morales on our campus. As of this time, no such information by either the police or my conversations with those I entrust to keep all the safe environment standards of our Parish and Diocese has come to light. I ask for your prayers for all involved in this case, and that if you have direct information to share on this case, please contact the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office immediately.

An article was reported today, Tuesday, October 23rd by the Island Packet: “The incidents the charges originated from did not occur at the church and had taken place over the past two or so years, Capt. Bob Bromage, Beaufort County Sheriff's Office spokesman.” I have no further information that I am able to share with you. Our staff is also not in a legal position to provide you with any additional information. If there is any additional information that the Bishop would like to share, we will do our best to communicate that to you.

As for our Youth Group and Confirmation programs, Mrs. Weaver, Mrs. Rzczycki, and Deacon Vern will be running the programs temporarily. They will all be in attendance at the October 27th Confirmation retreat along with the Diocesan Retreat Team.

Peace and Prayers,



Father Michael J. Oenbrink
Pastor