

Father Pilcher's Assignment to Holy Trinity Statement from Archbishop Naumann

Dear Holy Trinity Parishioners,

Last weekend, Father John Pilcher, Holy Trinity's new senior associate pastor, introduced himself at all the Masses. Father Pilcher was transparent about the fact that in 2021 there was an allegation brought against him while he was pastor at Mater Dei in Topeka. I want to acknowledge the gravity of this matter and assure you this allegation was found unsubstantiated after a thorough investigation by law enforcement and the Archdiocese, and a subsequent review by the Archdiocesan Independent Review Board. The Archdiocese followed its safe environment protocols and Father Pilcher fully cooperated with the process and stepped aside from ministry throughout the investigation.

After careful consideration of the investigative reports, I, with absolute confidence, returned Father Pilcher to ministry. It is important to note that Father Pilcher has always maintained his innocence. In May of 2022, Father Pilcher was reinstated as pastor of Mater Dei. From the time the allegation was received, the Archdiocese has been transparent and has provided public updates throughout the process. Father Pilcher has been a priest in good standing in the Archdiocese for the past 25 years, which includes over a decade serving at Catholic schools, and I am confident his vast experience will be an asset to your parish.

I have confidence in the thorough investigation that was conducted by law enforcement and the Archdiocese. Regardless, I recognize that this news has evoked mixed emotions. The paramount concern for the well-being and safety of our children is non-negotiable, and to that end, I can assure you that every precaution was taken in handling this case with the utmost diligence. The Archdiocese takes seriously all accusations of misconduct against clergy and other representatives of the Church. Please know that I would never assign a priest to a parish or school who might put the safety and well-being of our children at risk.

I have become aware that there is a petition asking for Father Pilcher's resignation. In addition to the petition, it has come to my attention that there is misinformation that has circulated in your parish. It is important to know that the groups who had access to the entire investigation and reports included law enforcement, the Office for Protection and Care, the Independent Review Board, and Archdiocese leadership. The Archdiocesan Independent Review Board, members appointed for their expertise, education, and passion for this topic, are seasoned qualified professionals who had access to all the Archdiocesan investigative notes and concluded that Father Pilcher should return to ministry.

Undoubtedly, we share a joint commitment to prioritizing the protection of our children and families. This commitment lies at the very core of our values. All of the parishes within the Archdiocese, including Holy Trinity, have consistently demonstrated diligence in following best practices concerning a safe environment including thorough background screenings and abuse awareness and prevention training for all clergy, staff, and volunteers. Our safety protocols do not allow an adult to be alone with a minor. Additionally, an age-appropriate curriculum has been implemented in our schools so children are taught awareness and the tools to speak up if they feel uncomfortable. Moreover, it is crucial that each one of us feels not only encouraged but empowered to promptly report any suspicions of abuse to civil authorities. The Archdiocese has established a report line at 1.913.647.3051, which provides an additional avenue for sharing concerns of suspected abuse.

It is imperative that we devote ourselves to the protection of the innocent and vulnerable, and also live in truth. It is disheartening to recognize that accusations of misconduct can affect anyone in today's world. In such cases, it is only fair that individuals are granted a process of due diligence where the evidence is thoroughly examined by professionals. Following this process ensures that justice is served for the victims while upholding that one is innocent until proven guilty. Father Pilcher's case is an example of the Church's collaborative efforts with civil authorities working effectively to address grave concerns and maintain justice.

I greatly appreciate your support, patience, and understanding. Together, we will continue to uphold the principles of truth, compassion, and unity. Thank you for being a crucial part of the Holy Trinity family. Please keep all who have been impacted by this in your prayers. I particularly ask for your prayers for Father Koller, Father Pilcher, Father Chadwick, and Father Katanka as they strive to be Good Shepherds for all the parishioners of Holy Trinity. You can be assured of my prayers for all of you.

Blessings,

Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann