



**THE MOST REVEREND  
Alexander J. Brunett  
ARCHBISHOP OF SEATTLE**

January 9, 2010

Dear Members of St. Mary of the Valley Parish Community:

You have all been in my prayers over the last several months as you patiently and prayerfully waited for the outcome of the canonical process regarding your former pastor, Father Michael OBrien. As you may recall, Father OBrien went on voluntary administrative leave in June, 2008, following an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor. He resigned as pastor of St. Mary of the Valley in June, 2009, so that the parish community could move forward in its Christian journey while the canonical process continued. While this process is usually very time consuming, it must be objective, thorough, and respect the rights of all involved.

The canonical process involves an investigation into the facts of the allegation, including interviews with the accused and his accusers and other parties with relevant information. The results of the investigation are considered by the Archdiocesan Review Board, and the parties are invited to meet with the Board members to present their perspectives. After due consideration, the Archdiocesan Review Board makes its recommendation to me. I, in turn, submit my opinion to the Holy Father regarding the disposition of the case.

During the course of the investigation and deliberations regarding the allegations against Father OBrien, it became clear that the Review Board and Father OBrien had different interpretations of his actions. Father OBrien has consistently maintained his innocence with regard to sexual abuse of a minor. At the same time, the time of administrative leave and subsequent resignation from his pastorate provided Father OBrien with an opportunity to reflect on his vocation and priestly ministry.

These reflections resulted in Father OBrien's realization that he had engaged in behaviors that were not consistent with his priestly vocation. Accordingly, he decided to petition the Holy Father for dismissal from the clerical state.

The Holy Father granted Father OBrien's request, and his return to the lay state (laicization) became effective on January 4, 2010. He will no longer be called "Father," and he will not be able to preside at Sacramental celebrations. He is encouraged to be an active participant in the life of the Church. I met with Michael recently, and he is at peace with his decision and grateful that the Holy Father granted his request to be laicized.

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Please join me in praying for Michael OBrien, all victims of abuse, those involved in the canonical process, and all the presbyterate. Be assured of my ongoing prayers for you as we begin a New Year filled with joy and hope.

With warmest regards and wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Most Rev. Alex J. Brunett  
Archbishop of Seattle