

Update regarding recent vandalism at Saint Raphael Pastoral Center

By Father Mele, March 20, 2020

On Wednesday March 11, 2020, I arrived at St Raphael Pastoral Center for an 8AM facilities meeting with Matthew Diersen, Gary Moshier and Joe Bonifate. We were greeted by the pre-school teacher Mary Ann Nene and her assistant Jan Snider as well as by a small group of pre-school families. Fr. John Sweeney was also present. They immediately informed me that a break in occurred during the night. The local Pittsburgh police as well as the Crime Scene Investigation Department were also present.

When we inspected the Pastoral Center, vandalism had occurred in the Multi-Purpose Room, the kitchen, the Holy Angels Conference Room, the Library, and the computer room on the second floor. The police were very attentive and helpful. It is our understanding that the incident did not involve robbery, nor did it involve the St. Raphael Church building.

The vandalism consisted of many pieces of furniture being overthrown. Some food and beverage supply being open and tossed around causing a mess. Objects and other supplies being taken from shelves and a couple supply cupboards and randomly tossed around. All of this mess was cleaned up by our maintenance staff within several hours. They did an excellent job of restoring each of the rooms, almost to the point that no one would have noticed any difference from what the room looked like before the vandalism occurred.

There was serious damage to the computer room. A number of laptops had already been removed at the time of the school closing. Nevertheless, several laptops still remained. These were severely damaged. A few other personal electronic items were also damaged in the library and the Holy Angels conference room. The property adjustor from our insurance company is scheduled to visit us this Wednesday, March 25, to appraise what insurance will cover for damages and loss.

Our security cameras provided images of several older male teenagers as the intruders. It is our understanding that these young men live in the local community and are not members of St Raphael Parish nor graduates of our former elementary school. We were also informed by the police that they went on, after vandalizing the Pastoral Center, to do the same at a local department store located in the East Liberty area. Although we do not have a confirmed report, we were told the young men will be arrested, not at our request but by the officials of the department store.

Since the break in, we have moved to eventually install security measures including an alarm system that will immediately notify the Pittsburgh Police, as well as our maintenance staff

and the clergy. Motion-sensitive lighting equipment near each entrance to our property will also be included. With the help and guidance of Dom Costa, trespassing and surveillance warning signs will be posted at all entrances to our property. These arrangements are customary on most parish and school grounds. We are grateful to Mr. Costa who is also requesting routine surveillance by the local police-during nighttime hours.

Finally, we want to thank our local Police and the Crime Scene Investigation Department for all their help. They explained that with the number of calls they receive, incidents involving harm to people are placed at the top of the priority list for follow up. Crimes involving property are listed as important but will be handled as soon as possible. Obviously, with the violence in society today, crimes involving property may take substantial time to investigate.