



Contact: I. Robert Durgan

www.morningstarboysranch.org

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Press Release

Spokane, Washington

My name is Bob Durgan. As president of the Morning Star Boys' Ranch Board of Directors, I would like to welcome you and thank you for joining us here today so that we may make a preliminary response to the recent filing of expanded allegations against Morning Star in general and Father Joseph Weitensteiner in particular.

First and foremost, I speak for the board, the staff and so many hundreds of people who have worked with the Ranch over the years when I say we find ourselves moving from shock at past allegations to bewilderment, confusion, frustration and even anger at current allegations.

To suggest that there has been a pattern of negligence at Morning Star in its mission to reach out to young men in need is slanderous. To accuse Father Joe Weitensteiner of sexually abusing children is outrageous. Father Joe adamantly denies any sexual abuse of any youngster at any time. He has been devastated by these false allegations. Those of us who have worked with him for many years want him to know how much we support his tenacious and steadfast commitment to young people -- both here at Morning Star and in his parish work.

Truth is at the heart of our concern today. Court documents may contain any allegation -- whether or not it's true. When those allegations are reported in the media, they in turn influence perceptions. Those perceptions can take on the appearance of truth when in fact they are false.

Please keep clearly in mind that federal, state and Ranch policies protect the privacy of the boys, their families and our staff. We respect those laws and guidelines. They are there for a reason. It does, however, at times leave us in a realistically awkward situation. We can feel like we are trying to battle against false charges with our hands tied behind our backs. We simply cannot address specifics because of pending litigation. However, we are more than confident that our day in court will vindicate the Ranch as well as Father Joe.

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In support of communicating the truth, we can advise you that Father Joe voluntarily submitted himself to a complete polygraph examination by a National expert in polygraph science. The examiner specifically questioned Father Joe regarding alleged sexual abuse by him or knowledge of alleged sexual abuse of Morning Star residents by others. Father Joe denied any claims of sexual abuse or knowledge of alleged sexual abuse and was found to be truthful in those statements. In short, Father Joe passed the polygraph test with flying colors.

The allegations presented are just that - allegations with no basis in fact. Members of the Board are seriously exploring legal options. Morning Star and Father Weitensteiner may bring claims against some claimants and/or their attorneys for attacking the reputation of individuals and the Ranch with false and fabricated accusations.

We simply ask again, for the community to trust that we will have our day in court, and that the decades of respect and support for Morning Star have been well warranted. The outpouring of support from alumni and friends in recent months has been extraordinary.

Father Joe remains on medical leave from the Ranch, something his physician recommended last July. Dan Kuhlmann continues to serve in the role of acting director during Father Joe's absence. Fr. Joe has issued a written statement which is included in your press packet.

The mission of the Ranch -- to reach out to boys who are hurting and in need of a safe and nurturing home -- remains the key. We absolutely refuse to be victimized by unfounded allegations. It is our sincere desire the attention being focused on Morning Star will again shine a bright light on a ministry that has helped hundreds of boys move on to better lives as men, as fathers, as community members. The Ranch continues its commitment to "Building Men by Believing in Boys."

We are not taking questions at this time. If you have questions, please go to our website at www.morningstarboysranch.org and click on the email info at the bottom of our home page. We will respond to your questions to the best of our ability.

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