



Small school. Big heart.

From the Desk of Mrs. Ingram

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In the wake of the school shooting in Parkland, FL, and the one so close to home in Benton, KY, we feel as vulnerable as ever when it comes to school shootings. One parent asked me for an update on our safety measures and although I'm very proud to report our progress, I admit to feeling a sense of desperation every time I hear about a school shooting. Clearly, this issue is more complex than locking doors and training faculty.

I'm sure you have noticed that school shootings are often carried out by a current student or a former student. This makes **prevention** a primary concern; taking care of our students, knowing them as well as possible, and being aware of any possible volatility is our first obligation.

Our second concern is really in your hands. We do not know which families have guns in their possession, so we have no way of knowing if a student, who may feel desperate or angry, could get **access to a weapon** at home. The family housing the shooter in Parkland thought the father was the only one in possession of a key to the boy's gun safe. They were wrong.

If you are a family that owns guns, we are relying on you to keep your family safe from them; we are relying on you to keep **us** safe from them.

Our third concern is broader. Weaving Catholic virtues into our curriculum, celebrating students when "caught in the act" of doing what is right, and teaching respect for others all day, every day are the foundation of creating and **maintaining a peaceful environment**. We promote mindfulness during our daily meditations, and our ability to turn to prayer is a source of comfort and coping.

I wrote to parents in 2013 that we would take all reasonable measures to improve our school safety. Here is what we have accomplished in the past five years:

- Doors are locked during the school day. A camera and intercom are used to monitor requests to enter the school. **New this year:** a "panic" button to

lock the doors immediately if we come under threat during the intervals when the doors are typically unlocked.

- Two-way radios in every classroom and at church allow communication between teachers, even during power outages. We use the radios to communicate for emergency evacuations and fire drills. **New this year:** In the event of a true emergency, the fire fighters and police department can synchronize to the same frequency to assist us.
- Cameras are in place at all major doorways, in the cafeteria, gym, and on the playground. **New this year:** Additional cameras were added to two outdoor locations. These cameras have 360° capabilities. The monitor for all cameras has been moved to a place more accessible to Joyce and me for viewing.
- Safety Management drills and exercises are undertaken regularly. Window evacuations are rehearsed, and exits are randomly blocked during fire drills to help students see alternate routes for egress.
- Classroom barricades were approved this summer, following certain specifications, by Ohio Fire Code. **New this year:** barricades are being purchased and faculty will be trained.
- Mental Health First Aid training was taken by more than half of our teaching staff this fall. This training helps us recognize the signs of a student in an emotional or mental crisis and get help for him or her immediately.
- Teachers and students have been taught the principals of ALICE training, whose first step is alerting people to anyone or anything that seems out of place. It works: We have employed ALICE principals in five separate situations since 2013, all with a safe outcome. The threats were minor in retrospect, but the practice of noticing and alerting helped us rehearse.
- We have researched building improvements that would put our cafeteria and gym and classrooms under one roof – a key concern in safety considerations. Those plans are not yet underway. A team committed to raising funds for such an extensive renovation would need to be convened at the invitation of our parish.

It may be, through the questions children ask or the wisdom of a classroom teacher, that school violence gets discussed. Here we are able to turn the conversation toward sensible thinking and faith, and reminders of what to do in an emergency. Aside from those discussions, I do not want children frightened or to add gun violence to their menu of coping mechanisms by giving these events too much air time. Given the wide ranges of ages in our building, I have purposely not discussed school shootings via prayer or announcements on the PA, although we have prayed for all victims of violence.

Thank you for trusting us with your children. Please pray for an end to gun violence, particularly on school campuses, where children should be safe.

In Christ,

Lizanne G. Ingram, M.Ed.
Principal

