

Response to AP article about St. Francis Grade School in Greenwood, MS on Tuesday, August 27, 2019

An article came out yesterday, August 27th, from the Associated Press about credible sexual abuse allegations against two men who had served at St. Francis in the mid to late 1990s. The two men's names are Paul West and Donald Lucas. Paul left Greenwood in November 1998 and subsequently left the Franciscan community in 2002. Donald died in August 1999, an apparent suicide.

The sexual abuse involved three men, all related, whose names appear in the article. It is a very graphic article about the sexual abuse that took place and what these men experienced when they were children. All three men attended St. Francis Grade School at the time of the abuse. Paul West had been a teacher and then principal of the school.

It is awful what happened; it is reprehensible; it is painful for the survivors. We, friars, are broken-hearted about the abuse which took place. All of our friars at St. Francis and of the Assumption BVM Province want to help these men as we are able. We have provided assistance to two of the men that is not discussed in the article. While the actions of the two former friars took place over two decades ago, they are still very painful in the lives of these men who suffered so much.

We, friars, are dedicated to the well-being of the students of the school and strive, together with faculty and staff, to create a safe and welcoming environment for the children whose parents entrust them to our care. Part of that dedication is the required work that all of our friars, Sisters, and our faculty and volunteers undertake in participating in the VIRTUS© program to protect children so that all of us are responsible for the care of the children. We are trained to recognize the grooming process that perpetrators use to victimize children, some of which are mentioned in the article. We are also trained on how to respond appropriately to what we observe. A popular phrase today is, "If you see something, say something." This is what we will continue to do.

We pray for healing for the survivors of this abuse and for all victims of abuse and for their families and friends.

If anyone has experienced sexual or physical abuse that occurred on our campus of St. Francis of Assisi or by any of our friars or other staff, we encourage them to come forward, please. They can call the parish, at **662.453.0623**. We cooperate with the Diocese of Jackson and the Victim's Assistance Coordinator as well. They can be contacted at **601.326.3728**.