



OFFICE OF THE
APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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July 17, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ:

On Monday, I met with members of the Diocesan Finance Council to continue our ongoing conversation about the financial health of the Diocese and ways to best address issues raised during the investigation into the allegations against Bishop Bransfield. I am most grateful to them for their generous service to the Diocese and for sharing their expertise and wisdom for the good of this local Church. Following that meeting I want to update you, the faithful of the Diocese, on the progress that is being made and to address important questions that have been raised over these past weeks and months.

A number of important decisions were taken by the Council, including the engagement of a new independent auditing firm, CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen LLP), which has been tasked with conducting the most recent fiscal year ends full audit. This audit is to be published on the diocesan website once it is completed and received. In addition, the Council continues to review best practices underway in other dioceses to determine what policies and procedures might be adopted in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston that will advance our commitment to implementing robust and effective financial controls. Further details will be communicated as the Council continues its important work in a spirit of openness and with the goal of restoring your confidence and trust.

From my visits and communications with people from throughout the Diocese I clearly understand that the Church has a long way to go to regain your confidence and trust. Reports about the former bishop's excessive spending and extravagant lifestyle and the credible allegations that he harassed young priests and seminarians have been a source of great pain and caused many to rightly ask: How could such behavior go unchecked for so long a time? Is there a process in place to check a bishop's behavior when he takes advantage of his co-workers or when he misuses diocesan funds that should be dedicated to the Church's mission?

These are questions that must be addressed not only in West Virginia but also in the wider Church. Last month, the U.S. Bishops took some important steps to do just that by voting to establish a third-party reporting system and other procedures to make it easier to report abuse, harassment and malfeasance by bishops. I had already put into place a similar system in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and one is now being established in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston as well.

It is important to note that metropolitan archbishops do not serve in a supervisory capacity over the suffragan bishops in their province. The measures adopted by the U.S. Bishops call for metropolitan archbishops to investigate complaints about suffragan bishops only when mandated to do so by the Vatican. That is why when I received a small number of complaints from parishioners in West Virginia regarding the very visible renovations being done to Bishop Bransfield's residence and to the chancery office, I was not authorized to conduct an investigation nor still less to demand a comprehensive financial review. Instead, I

raised these concerns with the bishop who assured me that the renovation of his residence (which had been damaged by fire) and to the chancery (which was being converted from a school to an office) were necessary and that these projects were approved by diocesan finance authorities. At the time, I had no reason to doubt the bishop's assurance that appropriate diocesan procedures and safeguards had been followed.

Things changed dramatically in early August 2018, when I was presented with first-hand credible allegations of sexual harassment and factual evidence of excessive spending. Though not authorized to investigate the matter myself, I immediately concluded that I needed to bring this direct evidence to the appropriate Church authorities in Rome and did so that very same day. I also reported it to the Apostolic Nuncio, the Pope's representative to the United States.

The Holy See responded by announcing the acceptance of Bishop Bransfield's letter of resignation the following month and appointing me Apostolic Administrator. I was also charged with overseeing a preliminary investigation of the former bishop so that the Holy See could make a judgment regarding his conduct. I decided it was best not to have people who worked for, or in, the Church to conduct this investigation. Instead, I assembled a team of lay people not in the Church's employ (with the exception of the canon lawyer). This team was professionally qualified for such an investigation. I instructed them to go wherever the evidence took them and I gave them full access to individuals and records in the Diocese. Following their extensive five-month investigation, the investigators confirmed the allegations of harassment and excessive spending of diocesan funds by the former bishop. I promptly submitted their report to the Holy See and acted to the full extent of my authority by restricting Bishop Bransfield from any public ministry in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

This brings us back to difficult questions: How was this able to occur?

When a bishop is entrusted to care for a diocese, he is expected to be a wise and honest steward of its resources. He has responsibility to ensure that these resources are for the Church's mission of faith, worship and service. The Church has also put into place structures to help ensure that funds are used well and wisely. These include volunteer, lay-comprised finance councils, the priest-consultors, audit committees, investment committees, and, in some dioceses, allocation committees. In addition, each diocese is to have a chief financial officer, controllers and internal auditors. Dioceses are also externally audited each year by an outside, independent accounting firm.

But here in Wheeling-Charleston, these procedures and processes did not prevent the bishop from misusing diocesan funds. Thus, together with the Diocesan Financial Council, I have directed that the following steps be taken in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to strengthen financial stewardship:

- Implementation of 3rd party reporting system for allegations against bishops (UNDERWAY);
- The hiring of a new external auditing firm and publishing of the annual audit report (APPROVED);
- Review and strengthening of diocesan finance policies (UNDERWAY);
- Expanding the Diocesan Finance Council, more than doubling its previous number, and increasing its meeting frequency to monthly (COMPLETED);
- Expanding the College of Consultors and increasing its meeting frequency to monthly (COMPLETED);
- The filing of papers with the State to dissolve "The Bishop's Fund," the discretionary fund established by the former bishop (COMPLETED);
- More transparent review of all capital projects (COMPLETED);

- Rebalancing the distribution of resources in the diocese so that greater resources will remain with parishes (UNDERWAY);
- Restructuring the diocesan school board (UNDERWAY);
- Enhancing the training of advisory bodies (UNDERWAY);
- Reviewing the administration of Wheeling Hospital and Wheeling Jesuit University (UNDERWAY); and
- Entering into a Contract of Sale for the former bishop's home at 52 Elmwood (COMPLETED).

Reports of Bishop Bransfield's lifestyle and spending habits have also raised questions, not only about his own situation, but also about other bishops. Although diocesan priests and bishops do not take a formal vow of poverty, they are expected to lead a simple lifestyle and to manage their own finances. They receive a salary and are expected to use whatever funds they have in ways that are appropriate to their calling. They are also provided by the diocese with basic necessities such as housing, food and healthcare.

As a result, their salaries are rightly modest and follow a scale typically set by a diocesan personnel board. Some priests and bishops receive additional support from family members and have other additional sources of income, whether through writing books, giving speeches, celebrating special liturgies or from obligations that require a greater level of commitment. For example, I serve as the Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, a position that receives compensation along with the order's other officers. And diocesan bishops are expected to live in homes provided by their diocese. For example, I live in downtown Baltimore with two other priests in a 190-year-old rectory that is physically attached to Basilica of the Assumption, the first Cathedral erected in the United States. It is where each of the last 13 bishops of Baltimore has lived. It serves not only as a rectory but also a place for diocesan functions.

Excessive financial expenditures and the personal use of diocesan funds by any bishop stands in contrast to those bishops who engage in responsible stewardship of the resources entrusted to them and who abide by the fiscal policies and controls in place to ensure a fiscally healthy Church.

I join you in praying for the appointment of a new bishop, a shepherd who will lead the Church in West Virginia by reflecting in his own life Christ's example of humility, selfless love, and service. In the darkest days of exile, Jeremiah told the Chosen People that God had plans for them, plans for "a future full of hope." As a diocesan church rooted in Christ's saving love, how much more confident we should be as we look to the future? Together, as the People of God, let us walk together, undaunted.

I truly do thank you for your kindness and understanding. May God bless you and keep you always in his love.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Apostolic Administrator