



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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Embargoed For Release

Thursday, August 20, 2020 5 a.m. Eastern

Statement by Bishop Mark Brennan of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese on the Congregation of Bishops' decision on amends plan for Bishop Michael J. Bransfield

I wish to announce to the faithful people of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston that the Congregation for Bishops in Rome has reached a decision on how former Wheeling-Charleston Bishop Michael J. Bransfield should fulfill Pope Francis' requirement that the Bishop "make personal amends for some of the harm he caused" while serving in this Diocese. This decision comes after extensive input from me, as the representative of the Catholic people of the Diocese, and with consideration of governing factors in both civil and canon law.

First, Bishop Bransfield has been told to make a public apology to the people of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese for the scandal he created. He is urged as well to apologize privately to certain individuals who reported abuse and harassment. We have received his letter of apology to the Diocese, which is being made public on our diocesan website, and are aware that some individuals have received a letter from the Bishop.

Second, Bishop Bransfield is required to repay the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston the amount of \$441,000 for unauthorized benefits received from diocesan resources. The Bishop has paid the Diocese that amount. These funds will be added to those already set aside by the sale of his former residence for assistance to victims of abuse. The Bishop has already complied with the Diocese's demand that he purchase, at fair market value, the diocesan vehicle he has been using in retirement.

Third, Bishop Bransfield will receive \$2,250 per month as his retirement stipend, adjusted for inflation, the amount recommended by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for retired bishops. However, no other benefits, such as for a secretary or travel, will be provided. This is in accord with the discretion that I have, as the current diocesan Bishop, according to the same USCCB guidelines, to reduce or eliminate additional benefits for a predecessor who did not retire in good standing. Thus, Bishop Bransfield's stipend will be

about one-third of the full package of \$6,200 ordinarily given to a retired bishop. He will continue to be covered by the health insurance plan for priests of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese, which will pay his modest long-term care insurance premium.

I am grateful to Pope Francis and the Congregation for Bishops for accepting in large part the outline of the amends plan I presented to Bishop Bransfield in November, 2019. That plan combined an insistence on restorative justice with a gesture of mercy, which is how God deals with all of us. I hope that the people of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston will see in the decision of the Congregation for Bishops a fair and reasonable resolution of this unseemly matter.

I am immensely grateful to the faithful of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese for their patience during the past year. This has been an ordeal for all of us. Now, I hope, we can move forward and not let the past distract us from the urgent work of faith that is so vital to the well-being of so many throughout this State who need the Church's ministry. Faith in God can help us heal the wounds we have suffered and give us strength to move ahead with the true mission of the Church: to bring Jesus Christ to the people he came to save and to work his wondrous power of renewal in them.

With my heartfelt affection and prayers for you, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

Most Reverend Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston