

September 3, 2020

Bishop Mark Brennan
Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
1311 Byron Street
Wheeling WV 26003

Dear Bishop Brennan,

We speak for countless members of the Catholic Church in West Virginia when we say: "Our faith has not been destroyed but our trust in our church leaders has been devastated."

The recently announced amends for Michael Bransfield were intended for SOME of the harm he caused. We respectfully ask you to take further action to address MORE of the harm caused by Michael Bransfield.

The seven actions listed below are concrete steps that can be taken by you at minimal financial cost to the Diocese. While there are many other actions that Catholics in West Virginia would like to see, we are hopeful that the items on this list can be addressed quickly and will be significant steps in restoring trust in our Diocese and its leaders.

1. Apologize. Strongly consider making a sincere apology to all who were harmed by your predecessor. Although we fully recognize that you were not in West Virginia during Bransfield's tenure, you hold the office of Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling Charleston and are therefore responsible for the organization. Further, in this historical moment when our larger society is examining how to address systemic failures and injustice, you can demonstrate what Catholics experience in the sacrament of Reconciliation: an expression of contrition creates an opening for forgiveness. Healing can begin when the institution acknowledges its failures. If there is uncertainty who to address, consider:
 - Abuse survivors and their families whose lives were changed in many ways.
 - Faithful Catholics who were stunned at the wasteful, extravagant spending and lack of controls and who can no longer trust the church to be good stewards of their financial gifts.
 - Young Catholics who are now embarrassed and ashamed of their faith and questioning church leaders.
 - The many Catholics who have abandoned their faith after learning the details of the evil actions and enabling behaviors of some Diocese leaders.
 - The many good men who serve as priests in our Diocese.
 - Employees and patients at Wheeling Hospital who were disregarded or who lost their livelihoods as the Diocese raided its accounts in search of more money.
 - Students, faculty, and alumni of Wheeling Jesuit University who watched as a long-standing university stumbled and fell.
 - Alumni of Bishop Donahue High School and Mount de Chantal Academy who saw their educational homes closed and destroyed.
 - Students and alumni of Wheeling Central Catholic School who were not protected as Michael Bransfield selected members of his Pontifical Crew.

- The entire Ohio Valley community, Catholic and non-Catholic who were damaged and hurt by the abuses, the enabling, and the shattering of trusted community institutions.
 - All West Virginians who have witnessed the abuse of power exercised by the leader of the Catholic Church in their state and the effects on themselves and their friends and neighbors.
2. As directed in the Bransfield Investigation Report (BIR) report, dispense with all use of title “bishop” and “bishop emeritus” at all times by the Diocese of Wheeling Charleston when referring to Michael Bransfield. While you have made clear that you do not have the power to remove the title, you do have the choice of words to use when addressing your predecessor. “Bishop Bransfield” should not appear in any letter, press release, or other correspondence sent by your office or the Diocese.
 2. Follow the recommendations of the BIR and, while maintaining their local parish assignments, remove from all Diocese-wide bodies and positions the three senior monsignors that were found to have been necessary enablers of Michael Bransfield’s abuse. In particular, the recent election of Monsignor Annie to the Priest Health Retirement Association shows egregious disregard for the new era of financial accountability to which our Diocese has committed.
 3. As identified in the BIR, pursue further investigation into allegations of Michael Bransfield’s sexual abuse of children. We ask that you request the Archdiocese of Philadelphia investigate the allegation of child sexual abuse that occurred in Lansdale, Pennsylvania in the late 1970’s, which the investigation report states, “may warrant further inquiry”.
 1. True Restorative Justice “Healing circles” were presented as an effective “victim-centered” response to healing the harm which we have all suffered. The Diocese needs to act on Restorative Justice and pilot healing circles in parishes in Wheeling and Charleston and also within the Diocesan offices, with an eye toward a full program of effective restorative justice across the Diocese. The Diocese should work with qualified partners such as the Congregation of St Joseph, and the Liaison for Restorative Justice and Healing for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.
 4. Continue the many positive actions taken with financial disclosures and audits, Ethics Point reporting system, Corporate Security and Investigations auditing etc.
 5. Most importantly, to restore the trust of the laity, it is imperative that the Diocese immediately create a plan, to be deployed in the post-pandemic period, for the selection and installation of independently-chosen lay representatives on all diocesan boards and committees including, but not limited to, the Finance Council, the Priests Health and Retirement Association, and the Board of Consultors. This includes the process of establishing a Diocesan Pastoral Council consisting of lay members from around the diocese.

We pray that you will be moved to act in these simple yet powerful ways to rebuild the trust of the faithful. The need is urgent, and the time is now.

We request a meeting (virtual or in person) to discuss this in more detail with you and your staff.

ACT

LCVC

304-281-9588

5olearys@gmail.com

laycatholicvoicesforchange@gmail.com