

Archbishop Announces Completion of Preliminary Investigation of Allegations Against Bishop Michael Bransfield, Imposes Ministerial Restrictions on Bishop Bransfield and Former Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Gordon Bennett, S.J.

For Immediate Release

Monday, March 11, 2019

On September 13, 2018, the Holy See announced the retirement of Michael J. Bransfield as Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston in West Virginia and appointed Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori as Apostolic Administrator of Wheeling-Charleston, with a mandate to conduct a preliminary investigation into allegations of sexual harassment of adults and financial improprieties by Bishop Bransfield.

The preliminary investigation, which took place over five months, was conducted by Archbishop Lori with the assistance of a team of five lay experts. The investigative team examined multiple allegations of sexual harassment of adults and financial improprieties. It involved interviews with more than 40 individuals, including Bishop Bransfield. The investigation has now been completed and will be sent to the Holy See for final judgment.

“Pending the assessment of the findings of the Holy See, as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, I have directed that Bishop Bransfield is not authorized to exercise any priestly or episcopal ministry either within the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston or within the Archdiocese of Baltimore,” Archbishop Lori said.

As part of recently announced protocols governing the conduct of bishops in the Archdiocese, Archbishop Lori determined that similar restrictions were warranted in the case of former Auxiliary Bishop of Baltimore, Gordon Bennett, S.J., who served within the Archdiocese of Baltimore from 1998 until 2004, when he was appointed Bishop of Mandeville, Jamaica. Since that time, he has not resided in or received any assignment in the Archdiocese of Baltimore or the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. In May 2006, the Archdiocese learned of an allegation of sexual harassment of a young adult by Bishop Bennett. Upon receiving the allegation, the Archdiocese immediately reported it to the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington, D.C. Bishop Bennett resigned from the Diocese of Mandeville in August 2006.

As a result of these restrictions, which the Holy See recently gave permission to the Archbishop to announce, Bishop Bennett is prohibited from exercising any priestly or episcopal ministry in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

The new protocols, announced in January, are designed to bolster the commitment of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to accountability for bishops and to zero tolerance for any bishop, priest, deacon, employee or volunteer credibly accused of sexual abuse. The additional measures that have been implemented include:

- The establishment of a third-party reporting system for allegations against bishops serving in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, including allegations of child sexual abuse or allegations of sexual harassment of adults;
- Expansion of purview of the Independent Review Board to include direct reception and reporting of allegations against bishops;
- Updated child protection policies that include the signing of a Code of Conduct by bishops;
- Issuance of an annual report by the Independent Review Board; and
- Re-establishment of a lay Archdiocesan Pastoral Council.

Archbishop Lori has since called for similar protocols to be enacted in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, in his capacity as Apostolic Administrator.

A full overview of information about the Archdiocese of Baltimore's commitment to the protection of children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals can be found at

www.archbalt.org.

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