



Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

Questions & Answers on Bransfield Report—June 7, 2019

INVESTIGATION & REPORT

What was Bishop Bransfield accused of?

Bishop Bransfield was accused of sexual harassment of adults and misusing Church funds during his tenure as Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

Who conducted the investigation of Bishop Bransfield?

Archbishop Lori was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston by the Holy See in September 2018 and was simultaneously appointed to oversee the investigation into the allegations against Bishop Bransfield. Archbishop Lori selected a team of experts in the fields of civil and canon law, human resources, law enforcement and accounting to conduct the six-month investigation.

Why didn't Archbishop Lori disclose the findings when the investigation was completed?

As the investigation was a preliminary investigation that will inform the Holy See's final judgment of Bishop Bransfield, the conclusions of the report were not initially made public. Archbishop Lori was required to submit the report to the Holy See for review and further action. At the request of Archbishop Lori, he received permission from the Holy See only on June 5 to release some of the investigative team's findings, including that the allegations of sexual harassment of adults were found to be credible and that Bishop Bransfield engaged in a pattern of excessive spending and misuse of diocesan funds.

Is the report publicly available?

The report was sent to Vatican officials in March, at the conclusion of the preliminary investigation. Any communication of further details from the report by diocesan officials must first be authorized by the Holy See.

How did the media obtain information from the report and why did the Church wait so long to share information about the findings?

It is unclear how the unauthorized release of information from the report became available to members of the media. Because the preliminary investigative report is part of a canonical process that has not yet concluded, information was withheld to maintain the integrity of that process.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

When did Church officials become aware of allegations of sexual harassment by Bishop Bransfield?

Last summer, Archbishop Lori received the allegations of sexual harassment against Bishop Bransfield and immediately reported them to the Holy See.

What steps have been put into place to prevent such harassment in the future?

Archbishop Lori has mandated the implementation of a third-party reporting system for allegations against bishops serving in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. This is in process and will soon be launched, allowing also for anonymous complaints to be made. Modeled after a program Archbishop Lori instituted in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the system uses a third-party vendor to receive and direct such reports to members of the lay-led Independent Review Board for reporting of any financial impropriety, sexual abuse or harassment to the appropriate civil and Church authorities.

What has the diocese done to help those victims of Bishop Bransfield?

The Diocese has committed to providing counseling to anyone who suffered harm by Bishop Bransfield and to all priests and lay personnel at the Chancery. The Archbishop has asked that a permanent program be developed and advertised to seminarians and priests that such services are available. For known victims, the Diocese will commit to reimbursing the costs for mental health assistance for a provider of their choosing.

FINANCES

What did Bishop Bransfield spend money on?

Though the investigative report is currently with the Holy See as part of its process of rendering a final judgment of the allegations against Bishop Bransfield, the Archbishop was given permission to share that during his tenure as Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, Bishop Bransfield engaged in a pattern of excessive and inappropriate spending. The investigation found that Bishop Bransfield initiated and completed extensive and expensive renovations to his private residences in both Wheeling and Charleston, as well as his intended retirement residence, the construction of which was halted at Archbishop Lori's request at the time of his appointment as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese. The investigation further found that Bishop Bransfield misused Church funds for personal benefit on such things as personal travel, dining, liquor, gifts and luxury items.

What will now happen with the Bishop's residence?

The report found excessive spending and renovations by Bishop Bransfield on his residence in the Parkview/Elm Grove section of Wheeling. Archbishop Lori has announced that, in his capacity as Apostolic Administrator - and with the support of the Finance Council - he has ordered the bishop's residence be sold and that proceeds go into a fund for victim-survivors of abuse.

Will he be forced to pay back the Diocese?

Archbishop Lori has said that the Holy See can require the Bishop to make restitution to the Diocese and that it is outside the scope of his authority as Apostolic Administrator.

Once the investigation is concluded, the Diocese will in turn take any action required by law.

How was Bishop Bransfield able to get away with spending so much Church money on himself?

There is no excuse or adequate explanation for how the former bishop was able to subvert checks and balances that were in place to ensure accountability and the proper allocation of funds to support the operations and ministries of the Diocese. Archbishop Lori has ordered a deep audit to determine weaknesses and lapses and is working closely with the members of the Finance Council to put in place stringent procedures and policies to prevent abuse of Diocesan resources from ever happening again. Also, in reviewing the report, Archbishop Lori observed that it was evident from those who spoke with investigators that the Bishop's management style and personality undermined the effectiveness of diocesan policies, controls and oversight procedures. In some cases, the Archbishop added, it is apparent that the judgment of diocesan personnel was impacted by the culture of fear of retaliation and retribution that the former bishop fostered.

What steps have been put into place to safeguard Church finances?

Archbishop Lori has worked closely with the leadership of the Diocese, including members of the Diocesan Finance Council, to identify how best to prevent such behaviors from occurring in the future. Clearly, despite proper checks and balances, diocesan policies and oversight procedures were subverted and we are determined to prevent this type of lapse from occurring in the future.

Why should parishioners continue to donate money to the Diocese?

The vast majority of parishioners' offertory contributions goes directly to their parishes and the remainder supports the wide range of essential ministries of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston which benefit those most in need. Moreover, funds contributed to the Catholic Sharing Appeal are mostly returned to local parishes across the State of West Virginia, and the Diocesan portion is returned through ministries in Catholic Schools, Catholic Charities West Virginia and other programs. The generosity of parishioners is vital to sustaining the broad range of services extended to those most in need – and in the areas of health care, social services, addiction resources and recovery, education, job training and resources and care for the elderly.

MONETARY GIFTS TO BISHOPS & CARDINALS

Why were the names of clerics that received monetary gifts from Bishop Bransfield omitted from the investigative report?

The Archbishop suggested that the names of those who had received financial gifts be eliminated since it was not clear that the gifts were entirely inappropriate since many included honoraria for speeches and other ministerial functions. In addition, the receipt of gifts was not thoroughly investigated nor was it the focus of the investigation. Moreover, a full accounting would have necessitated listing all who had received gifts from the former bishop, which had not been identified. The focus of the investigation was on credible accusations of sexual harassment of adults by former Bishop

Bransfield, as well as his lavish lifestyle & spending. The Archbishop believes now that the suggestion to withhold names of bishops – including his own - who had received monetary gifts was ill-advised and he understands how this can easily be misperceived.

How much did Archbishop Lori receive from Bishop Bransfield?

Archbishop Lori received a total of \$7,500 in financial gifts from Bishop Bransfield over the course of his seven years as Archbishop of Baltimore. Bishop Bransfield sent Archbishop Lori \$5,000 at his installation in May 2012, and then sent the Archbishop a check for \$500 each Christmas annually. The most recent gift was received at Christmas in December 2017. Media references to \$10,500 included payments to the Archbishop for Masses he celebrated in Wheeling for Catholic legal professionals in the form of stipends and travel reimbursement; these were not gifts. Archbishop Lori has since returned the \$7,500 in gifts to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston with a request that the money be donated toward the work of Catholic Charities in West Virginia.

BISHOP BRANSFIELD

Where is Bishop Bransfield and what is his status?

Archbishop Lori, in his capacity as Apostolic Administrator of Wheeling-Charleston and as Archbishop of Baltimore, ordered Bishop Bransfield to depart Wheeling and suspended his right to exercise priestly or episcopal ministry in either the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston or the Archdiocese of Baltimore. This is the extent of Archbishop Lori's authority over Bishop Bransfield, who is presently considered a retired bishop.

When will a final decision be made regarding Bishop Bransfield's future?

There has been no indication given by the Holy See as to a timetable for announcing its final determination of the investigative findings concerning these credible allegations against Bishop Bransfield.

When will a new bishop be named to lead the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston?

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, alone determines the appointment of bishops to dioceses in the United States and globally. It is not known when a new bishop will be named, but Archbishop Lori has appealed to the Holy See to prioritize the appointment of a new bishop given the very challenging circumstances caused by these issues.