



4.6.18

**Statement from The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico
Bishop of Erie**

Today, the Diocese of Erie is announcing a major update in our *Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth*.

The policy we've been using has served us well. It has always been a living document, adapted and adjusted to the times. But today, we are announcing one of the most significant revisions we've made to the policy since it was established 32 years ago.

But before I share details of those changes with you, I want to express my sincere sorrow and apologies for the sexual abuse that has occurred within the church, particularly here in the Diocese of Erie. I have met with victims and listened to the pain they and their loved ones experienced. It is appalling to learn what they went through. Abuse is traumatic enough—but it's earth-shattering when it's perpetrated by someone who is in a position of trust. I have a profound personal respect for survivors of abuse.

Like anyone else, I cannot comprehend how someone can victimize innocent children and youth. The vast majority of our priests are striving to live good and holy lives in service to God, to parishioners and to the community at large. The same goes for our many dedicated teachers and agency employees.

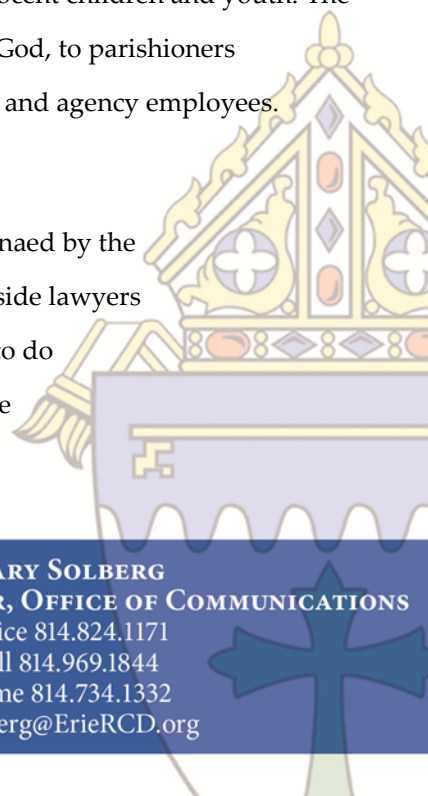
I am proud to be counted among the priests of this diocese.

The Diocese of Erie is one of six Pennsylvania dioceses that was subpoenaed by the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office in September 2016. With the help of outside lawyers and investigators, we have reviewed any files we could find that had anything to do with inappropriate behavior by people — both clergy and lay — working for the

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diocese itself, as well as any Catholic school or agency in the diocese, between 1947 and 2018. In fact, one case reached back to 1944.

We have shared everything we discovered through this investigation with the attorney general and continue to work with his office in this important undertaking.

The investigation provided us with an opportunity to intensify the efforts we had begun making to gain a fuller understanding of our past. We sought the best advice and counsel we could get in updating our approach to protecting children and vulnerable adults.

And so today, the Diocese of Erie is unveiling a significantly revised *Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth*. We believe the policy is among the most comprehensive in the nation.

Members of the diocesan staff have been working for more than a year with the Pittsburgh-based law firm, K&L Gates, to develop this policy. Members of my staff and administration, the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Review Board all have collaborated in the process and given their full support to the approach we are announcing today.

The new policy includes three major new components.

First, it has an expanded set of definitions that leave no doubt as to what constitutes abuse. It also includes definitions for terms such as threshold evidence. In addition, it explains what needs to be present for a child abuse case to be considered substantiated.

The second significant change in our policy is the greatly expanded role of the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth. It will now become the central depository of all allegations from any school, agency, parish or other source connected to the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Erie.

As you may know, anyone working or volunteering with minors or youth in any Catholic institution in the Diocese of Erie currently must secure clearances from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Going forward, in addition to those clearances, they will need a clearance from our Office for the Protection of Children and Youth.

The third aspect of our new policy is an updated and revised website, going live today at www.ErieRCD.org/policyupdate.htm. The site contains the new policy in its entirety.

Per our new policy, the site includes the names of people who have been credibly accused of actions ranging from furnishing pornography to minors to direct, sexual assault of minors. These actions, in the diocese's judgment, disqualify them from working with children and youth.

The list, which made headlines before we even released it, is different than what other dioceses have released in that it includes 34 priests — 20 of whom are deceased — as well as 17 lay men and women, two of whom are deceased.

I know people stand firmly on both sides of whether or not releasing the names of these individuals is the right decision. Some will say that it has taken far too long to publish these names. Others think we shouldn't do it at all. They say we are not showing mercy.

As Catholics, we believe the Lord has infinite mercy and absolution for those who are contrite and sincerely seek forgiveness. But that does not mean they are free from the ramifications of their behavior.

We made efforts to notify all the living people on this list through our attorneys.

In publishing the list of those who have credible allegations against them, the first goal is to protect children. It is not possible for us to monitor all the people on the list. This is an important step in helping the public become aware of information that is important for the community's well-being.

Some are concerned that publicizing these names will open old wounds. Very importantly, we are actually publishing the names in the hope of helping the victims/survivors move one step closer to healing those same wounds. It is important they know they are not alone.

We encourage victims of sexual abuse by people affiliated with the Catholic Church to come forward for their own benefit and to help us have an even more comprehensive understanding of the past. We know that with their help, the list of names may grow.

We understand that victims' memories may be incomplete. We want to tell victims not to be concerned if they do not have exact dates or locations of their abuse. We are willing to listen to them and accompany them as we all search for the truth.

We do not know when the grand jury report will be forthcoming, but I am sure it will be a sobering moment for all of us. I encourage the wide distribution of the information you'll find at the end of this statement in the hope that all victims who feel locked in darkness will consider coming forward to begin the healing process.

Pastoral care and compassion for victims, as well as the protection of children and vulnerable adults, is a top priority of the Diocese of Erie. The diocese encourages anyone who has experienced sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy or any employee or volunteer of the church, to contact law enforcement. To report abuse to the independent investigators retained by the Diocese of Erie, email ErieRCD@KLGates.com. In addition, victims or concerned individuals can report abuse to ChildLine, an outreach of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, by calling 800-932-0313. The line is open 24/7, and callers may choose to remain anonymous. Victims also are welcome to contact the diocese directly to report abuse at 814.451.1543. Counseling assistance is available for victims and/or their families through the diocesan victim assistance coordinator, Dr. Robert Nelsen, who can be reached at 814.451.1521.