



THE BUFFALO NEWS

DEPEW PRIEST PLEADS GUILTY TO EXPOSURE

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A Depew priest arrested last month in a continuing crackdown on lewd behavior in Ellicott Creek Park pleaded guilty Friday to a non-criminal charge.

The Rev. Charles M. Werth, 66, pleaded guilty to exposure, which is a violation.

Tonawanda Town Justice Christopher Burns fined him \$295 and ordered him to stay out of the park and continue to receive counseling.

Father Werth, pastor of St. Barnabas Church on George Urban Boulevard, originally was charged with a misdemeanor count of sexual abuse Aug. 15 after an incident with another man. That charge was dropped after he pleaded guilty to the lesser charge.

A spokesman for the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo said Father Werth would remain on administrative leave from his church duties pending a meeting with the bishop to discuss his future. Father Werth has been a priest for 41 years.

Since mid-June, dozens of men have been arrested by Town of Tonawanda and Amherst police in connection with lewd acts at Ellicott Creek Park in Tonawanda and Ellicott Creek Island Park in Amherst.

In June, County Judge Michael L. D'Amico was charged with public lewdness, a misdemeanor, after he was arrested in Ellicott Creek Island Park. The charge was dismissed in July, and D'Amico pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct, a non-criminal violation, and was fined \$100.

Uniformed and undercover police officers have been keeping an eye on the area since neighbors reported problems.

Some alleged lewd acts occurred when undercover officers were approached by men who would engage in sexual acts and invite the officers to join them. Some were charged with sexual assault after grabbing an officer.

The suspects listed addresses from throughout Western New York and ranged in age from their 20s to their late 70s.

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