

# Diocese places Msgr. Leo McCarthy on leave following allegation of sexual abuse

McCarthy assists in parish ministry at Blessed Sacrament Church

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — A retired Buffalo priest with numerous accolades was placed on administrative leave by Bishop Michael Fisher on Friday after an allegation of child sexual abuse.

Rev. Msgr. Leo McCarthy, 88, is alleged to have sexually assaulted a 12-year-old girl at St. Matthew's Church in 1982, according to a lawsuit filed Wednesday in State Supreme Court against St. Matthew's Church

and School.

McCarthy, a popular priest who assists in parish ministry at Blessed Sacrament Church in the Town of Tonawanda, denied committing any acts of abuse, the Diocese of Buffalo said in a news release.

According to the lawsuit, McCarthy asked the young girl to help at the church, then showed her pornography and forced her to sit on his lap as he allegedly hugged and touched her.

During the two months the girl was asked to help at the church, McCarthy is alleged to have had sex with the 12-year-old girl six or seven times in an area where priests and altar boys changed before and after Mass.

The girl reported McCarthy's behavior to a teacher at the school, but the teacher didn't believe her and did nothing to investigate or protect her, the lawsuit stated. The victim said she was later expelled by the school when McCarthy learned that she reported allegations of

abuse.

When the girl's mother suspected that she was pregnant, she told her mother about the abuse, the lawsuit stated.

McCarthy will remain on leave while an investigator appointed by the diocese completes an investigation and a final determination is made by the Diocesan Review Board. The diocese also stated that it reported the allegations to the Erie County District Attorney's Office.

“Bishop Fisher wishes to emphasize that the decision to restrict Msgr. McCarthy's priestly faculties at this time is in no way intended to indicate his guilt or is it a determination about the truth or falsity of the complaints,” the diocese stated in a news release.

The Foundation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo honored McCarthy at the 2017 Curé of Ars Awards Dinner for “his extensive work in promoting vocations to youth as an educator, coach and mentor.”

In 2018, the gymnasium at Baker Hall School in Lackawanna was named in honor of McCarthy, who was involved in athletics at Catholic schools in the region for decades. McCarthy chaired the fundraising drive and renovations for the gym.

McCarthy is the fifth priest to be placed on

administrative leave by Bishop Fisher since June.

Bishop Fisher previously announced the administrative leaves of Rev. Msgr. James G. Kelly, Fr. Adolph Kowalczyk, Fr. Gregory Dobson and Fr. Mieczyslaw (Matt) Nycz.

To date, more than 220 clergymen or Catholic nuns in the Diocese of Buffalo have been accused of some form of sexual misconduct. Fisher's predecessor, Bishop Richard J. Malone, resigned after a Vatican investigation of his handling of abuse claims, and State Attorney General Letitia James last year sued the diocese for "failing to follow mandated policies and procedures that would help to prevent the rampant sexual abuse of minors by priests within the Catholic Church."