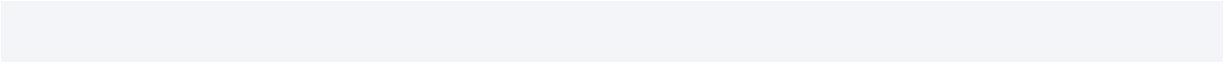


After archdiocese learns of accusations in lawsuit, Annunciation's pastor, Msgr. Mellone, and Deacon Bell of St. Martin's removed from ministry following protocols of Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy

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<https://cathstan.org/news/local/after-archdiocese-learns-of-accusations-in-lawsuit-annunciation-s-pastor-msgr-mellone-and-deacon-bell-of-st-martin-s-removed-from-ministry-following-protocols-of-child-protection-and-safe-environment-policy>



The parish and school communities of the Church of the Annunciation in Washington, D.C., and St. Martin of Tours in Gaithersburg, Maryland were notified that the pastor of Annunciation, Msgr. Michael Mellone, and Deacon Lawrence Bell of St. Martin of Tours have been accused in an announced lawsuit against The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington after the Maryland Child Victims Act took effect on Oct. 1.

In Oct. 3 letters to those communities posted on the Annunciation and St. Martin of Tours websites, Father Anthony Lickteig, the archdiocese's Episcopal Vicar for Clergy and Secretary for Ministerial Leadership, wrote that a John Doe plaintiff had made abuse allegations against Msgr. Mellone and Deacon Bell from during the time that they served at St. Martin of Tours in the 1990s.

“This was the first time we have learned of any such allegation against Msgr. Mellone or Deacon Bell,” Father Lickteig wrote.

He said that upon learning of the allegations, “the Archdiocese immediately implemented the protocols in our Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy. The allegations have been reported to law enforcement, as required by our policy,” and the archdiocese has prohibited Msgr. Mellone and Deacon Bell from exercising ministry, and they have

been instructed not to enter the parish property pending a review of the allegations.

“These precautions are mandated by our policies and should not be interpreted as any sort of judgment about the truth or falsity of these allegations, or about Msgr. Mellone or Deacon Bell or the person who has made these allegations,” Father Lickteig wrote in his letter to the St. Martin’s parish and school communities.

In both the letters to the Annunciation and St. Martin’s communities, Father Lickteig said those parishes and schools take seriously their responsibility to protect children in their care.

“Given the gravity of this matter, and the archdiocese’s own deep commitment to the safety of youth and the healing of those who have been harmed by abuse, we felt it was important that you be informed of this information,” Father Lickteig said, adding that the archdiocese will keep those communities informed with any updates to share about that situation, “bearing in mind that the allegations have been presented in the form of an anonymous claim in a contested lawsuit.”

In the letter to the Annunciation parish and school communities, Father Lickteig said that in coming days, the archdiocese will appoint a temporary

administrator for Annunciation, and archdiocesan representatives will be present at all the Masses there this Sunday, and will be coordinating counselors to be on hand to speak to any children or parishioner wishing to do so. In the St. Martin's letter, he said the archdiocese will work with their pastor to make counselors available for those who need them.

In both letters, Father Lickteig underscored that the archdiocese's Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy mandates immediate reporting of suspected abuse to the authorities, and he encouraged people, if they become aware of improper conduct by anyone in archdiocesan ministry, to contact Courtney Chase, the Executive Director of the Archdiocese's Office of Child Protection & Safe Environment, at 301-853-5302 or the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department's Youth and Family Services Unit at 202-576-6768 or the Montgomery County Maryland Special Victims Unit at 240-773-5400.

Concluding his letters to the Annunciation and St. Martin's communities, Father Lickteig wrote, "Please keep in your prayers those who are affected by this very painful situation. Thank you for your vigilance in our ongoing efforts to keep our young people safe from harm."

In a Sept. 29 letter to the people of the archdiocese before the Maryland Child Victims Act took effect, Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory expressed his profound sorrow for acts of abuse that occurred within the Church, and he renewed his pledge to continue archdiocesan efforts to bring healing to survivors, their families and the faithful, and to provide a safe environment for all, including with extensive training and a zero-tolerance policy.

Information on the archdiocese's Child Protection and Safe Environment policies, practices and resources can be found at <https://adw.org/about-us/resources/child-protection/>

A fact sheet is available at <https://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/09/10-things-to-know-ADW-child-protection-policy.pdf> .