



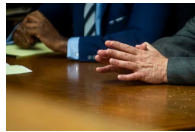
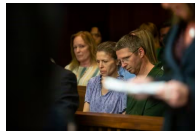
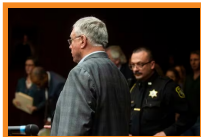
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SAGINAW AND BAY CITY NEWS

Saginaw Catholic priest, sex offender Father Bob DeLand returned to lay state by Pope Francis

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Robert DeLand Jr. sentenced to prison



By [Cole Waterman](#) | Cole_Waterman@mlive.com

SAGINAW, MI — A once-beloved local Roman Catholic priest and convicted sexual assailant is a priest no longer.

More than a year after he was paroled from prison, Robert J. “Father Bob” DeLand Jr., 75, has been laicized, or removed from the clerical state and returned to the lay state.

A Nov. 22 communication from the Chancery to the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw’s priests contained an official announcement stating, “The Diocese of Saginaw announces that Robert DeLand submitted a petition to the Holy Father for permission to leave the priesthood and return to the lay state. Pope Francis granted his request for dismissal from the clerical state, which is effective immediately.”

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Erin Looby Carlson, the Diocese’s director of communications, confirmed DeLand submitted his petition on June 27 of this year. He did so at the Diocese’s encouragement, she added.

Pope Francis granted DeLand dispensation from the clerical state on Sept. 7, though it took time for the necessary documents to reach the Diocese, Looby Carlson said.

“The Diocese of Saginaw no longer has any canonical authority over Robert DeLand since he has returned to the lay state,” she added.

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The Diocese placed DeLand on administrative leave on Feb. 26, 2018. It then removed DeLand from priestly duties on April 25, 2019.

DeLand in March 2019 pleaded no contest to second-degree criminal sexual conduct, gross indecency between two males, and manufacturing or distributing an imitation controlled substance. By pleading no contest as opposed to guilty, DeLand did not admit to having committed any crime, though presiding Saginaw County Chief Circuit Judge Darnell Jackson treated him as guilty when he sentenced him in April 2019 to two to 15 years in prison.

In a parole board hearing in December 2020, DeLand admitted to the offenses he had been convicted of. DeLand said “because there was attraction on my part, that was shameful and inappropriate. Sorry. (I) was attracted to him because I believed he was convenient [sic], was suppose [sic] to be giving him help with the court system and he was near me,” according to notes MLive obtained from the Michigan Department of Corrections via the Freedom of Information Act.

The MDOC paroled DeLand on April 27, 2021. He is to remain on parole until the same date in 2023. He must also register as a as a sex offender until Oct. 13, 2045, at which time he will be 98.

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Case background

Police began investigating DeLand in November 2017 after receiving a complaint that the priest had inappropriate contact with a minor. At the time, DeLand was pastor at St. Agnes Parish in Tittabawassee Township, volunteered as a greeter at Freeland High School, and was so popular a local road was named after him.

Police arrested DeLand in February 2018 and he subsequently faced seven charges related to the alleged sexual assaults of two teens and one young man.

DeLand in September 2018 pleaded no contest to all charges. He later withdrew his pleas and went to trial on a few of the counts in March 2019 and was found not guilty by a jury. Some of those charges stemmed from allegations that DeLand had attempted to sexually assault a teen in the coatroom of St. Agnes Church during a May 2017 memorial service for a classmate who had died by suicide.

The day after the acquittal, and with two more trials looming, DeLand pleaded no contest to the three counts he was subsequently sentenced on.

During DeLand's sentencing, Saginaw County Assistant Prosecutor Melissa J. Hoover read a statement penned by the victim in the charges DeLand had pleaded to.

"I would like to make it known what that man has done to me will define my life forever," Hoover read.

While dealing with the loss of a friend by suicide, "This man of God told me I wasn't OK, no matter how much I told him I was strong," Hoover read.

The teen testified in court that DeLand gave him cigarette packs and \$100 to acquire ecstasy.

The teen was 17 at the time he visited DeLand's Saginaw Township condominium in February 2018, equipped with a recording device provided by police. That's when DeLand massaged the teen's feet, chest and back, and put his hand on the teen's buttocks for a minute or two, the teen testified.

DeLand also was accused by a man who was age 21 at the time of getting him intoxicated at DeLand's condo and sexually assaulting him. That man was to testify in a trial that was canceled by DeLand's pleas.

At least two lawsuits have been filed against DeLand. One was filed by a diocese-employed maintenance worker and relative of the teen whom DeLand allegedly tried to assault in the church coatroom. The other was filed by attorney Todd J. Weglarz and names the Saginaw diocese and now-deceased Bishop Joseph Cistone as codefendants.

Weglarz filed his suit on behalf of a juvenile and an adult representative, alleging DeLand had inappropriately touched the juvenile by "groping and fondling his crotch and buttocks, feet and toes." The boy fled the condo and police arrested DeLand the same night.

The lawsuits are still pending in Saginaw County Circuit Court.

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