

## Detroit Archdiocese: Priests and Policy

Status Report from Ned McGrath, Director of Communications

“The Archdiocese of Detroit implemented its [Policy on the Sexual Abuse of Minors](#) by Clergy in 1988; it has been revised three times. A review of the most recent draft is close to completion, taking into consideration:

- recent events and experiences
- the document enacted in June 2002 by the bishops of the United States, The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People ([The Dallas Charter](#))
- the [November revisions](#) to The Dallas Charter and the additional revisions to select canonical (Church law) provisions, known as norms, that accompany the document

“As written, the provision of the so-called ‘Dallas Charter’ to permanently remove a priest from ministry is to be utilized when the sexual abuse of a minor has occurred, certified either through an admission from the priest himself or by a determination that can be proven to a canonical standard. (See [CanonLawBackgrounder.PDF](#))

“To date, the situations of the following Detroit archdiocesan priests have been reviewed in light of the Dallas Charter: Frs. Gary Bueche, Tony Conti, Michael Daly, Robert Haener and Walter Lezuchowski. While it is true they will no longer be able to minister publicly in the Church, their future plans are theirs to determine. As are all priests, they, too, have been called to prayer and penance. Any final resolution on the question of laicization has yet to be determined. Ongoing contact and communication with these priests is coordinated by the cardinal archbishop’s delegate, Msgr. Walter Hurley, with assistance from Msgr. Michael Lefevre.

“Currently, the following priests are having their situations reviewed to determine what degree the provisions of the Dallas Charter apply: Frs. Robert Burkholder, Joseph Femminio, Lawrence Nawrocki, Ralph Quane, Gerald Shirilla, Joseph Sito, and Peter Van der Linden. They are restricted from any public ministry, and, in some cases, have had additional restrictions placed upon them.

“Finally, the following priests are currently on an administrative leave of absence, pending the resolution of serious and substantive allegations brought forward against them: Frs. Edmund Borczyk, William Brennan, Dennis Duggan, Jude Ellinghausen, Dennis Laesch, Alfred Miller, Ron Williams, James Wysocki and Robert Wyzgoski. In such cases, as has been stated in the past, a substantive allegation is not— in and of itself— a determination of guilt. These priests have been temporarily restricted from any public ministry.

“Ongoing contact and communications with the above priests is also coordinated by Msgr. Hurley, with assistance from Msgr. Lefevre. The archdiocese intends to be as fair and as careful as possible in resolving these cases, taking whatever time is necessary to do so.

“Harry Benjamin and Dennis Martell were ordained for the archdiocese but were laicized. Gerald Vesnaugh, whose case was processed years before the establishment of the archdiocesan policy, has left the priesthood. The USCCB backgrounder on the ‘Loss of the Clerical State’ offers more detail on what it means for the priest— and his former resident diocese— when he is dispensed from his sacramental obligations and returned to the status of a layman. (See [USCCBbackgrounder.PFF](#))

“Frs. Gary Berthiaume and Edward Olszewski were ordained for the Detroit archdiocese, but incardinated/transferred to other arch/dioceses—Berthiaume to Cleveland, Olszewski to Miami. Jason Sigler, ordained by the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, has left the priesthood but served in the Detroit archdiocese (and Lansing diocese) briefly as a visiting priest.

“As for the religious order priests who have served in the archdiocese, Frs. Neil Emon Bruce Maxwell, Jim Moeglein, and Thomas O’Brien are Crosier Fathers (OSC); Fr. Thomas Johnston is a Dominican priest (OP). Their respective provincials would have the latest information on their status.

“In describing the current status of the archdiocesan priests, examples can be found in how the media describes a lawyer who has been disbarred, a doctor who has had his license revoked, or a police officer who has been suspended. And to clarify the role of the archdiocese in these situations, it can be said that while the Church is responsible for these priests’ ministerial assignments, they themselves, as private citizens, are responsible for their personal behavior, and society rightly holds them accountable.

“Additionally, the names of these priests have been made public by the archdiocese and shared with civil authorities. Their stories have been reported in the archdiocesan newspaper, The Michigan Catholic, in the major daily newspapers, and on radio and television. In most of these cases, the priests have been offered and accepted professional counseling or treatment protocols. These individuals, who are not in public ministry, may not want to share their addresses and/or current living arrangements with reporters or the public. That is their choice to make; the archdiocese will not try to influence that decision.

“As it would with for any and all of its workers and/or hired staff, the archdiocese would respectfully decline to discuss specific details of the current ‘personnel arrangements’ with these priests, such as their support or medical benefits. Under Canon Law, a bishop must provide some level of support for his diocesan priests, regardless of their status.

“A draft of the third revision of the misconduct policy was presented in September 2002; it is currently being reviewed by consultative bodies in the archdiocese composed of both

clergy and lay people. Also in September, the newly constituted [Board of Review](#) was introduced; it is led by a lay chairman, and its members include a psychologist, a prosecutor, a retired judge, a health care executive, and a canon lawyer. Four of the board members are parents.

“The canonical norms that accompanied The Dallas Charter have received Vatican approval (or [recognitio](#)); they became effective March 1, 2003. In accordance with the provisions of the Dallas Charter, the Detroit archdiocese will adopt the approved changes and is proceeding with a final review and implementation of its revised policy.”

from Ned McGrath  
Director of Communications  
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