

Lay Catholic Voices for Change

PO Box 1295
Morgantown WV 26507

July 9, 2019

Archbishop William Lori
320 Cathedral Street
Baltimore MD 21201

Dear Archbishop Lori:

In the wake of the revelations of sexual abuse committed by Michael Bransfield of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and the revelations of financial dishonesty in which the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston has engaged, we wrote to you by both email and postal mail on June 12, 2019.

At that time, we informed you that our organization was created by parishioners from north-central West Virginia and that we had been joined by others from around the state. Since June 12, our organization has continued to grow. To date, over eight hundred people have signed our letter.

We set forth in our June 12 letter a variety of remedial actions you and the Diocese could take to repair the trust that has been breached.

We wrote to you in good faith.

You chose to ignore our letter – in much the same way you and other church leaders ignored or discounted the laity, clergy, and religious who, over the years, cried out for help in ridding ourselves of Michael Bransfield and in much the same way you and other church leaders ignored or discounted the repeated press reports of Michael Bransfield's improper behavior.

Now you ignore us – Catholics who faithfully support the church with our time, talent, and treasure. You apparently have so little respect for lay people, you chose not to issue even a pro forma response to our letter.

You simply ignored us.

We love the West Virginia Catholic community. We love it so much that the members of our group – whose views span the spectrum from right to left and all spots in between –

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have united around that common love and set aside any differences we might have with each other. Our common focus is on the healing of our diocese by restoring the faithfulness and trust between the laity and our shepherds, which has been harmed due to past moral and financial corruption.

It is our common love for the church community that compels us to shake off any and all complicity with the sexual abuse and financial dishonesty that has corrupted our Diocese. We can no longer permit our donations to support a Diocese whose financial secrecy and dishonesty are the foundation for its underwriting acts of sexual abuse and immoral spending.

Until and unless the Diocese hires a new, independent, and trustworthy auditor to audit the Diocese's finances and until and unless the Diocese announces a time line for releasing an independently audited financial statement, complete with the auditor's opinion, we will not donate money that would otherwise go to or through diocesan offices.

In particular:

A. We will withhold donations that would otherwise go to the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese.

We will withhold all contributions to collections and drives intended to go to the Diocese including, but not limited to:

- Catholic Sharing Appeal
- Priests Retirement Fund
- Education of Seminarians
- Diocesan Scholarship Association
- Catholic Charities West Virginia

These are all good causes that need honest accounting to maintain the public trust needed for them to survive. We will remind people that the Diocese took our money and gave it to Michael Bransfield to give to his pals, to spend on liquor, jewelry, luxury travel, a personal chef, and opulent renovations. We cannot presently trust a diocese that launders tax exempt money for non-tax exempt purposes to properly convey our donations to these good causes.

B. We will withhold money that would otherwise go through the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese.

Special national collections, such as the collection for the Catholic Communications Campaign on July 21, 2019, go through Wheeling and then on to the recipient.

Because of the financial dishonesty in which the diocese has engaged, we cannot presently trust the Diocese to send our donations on to the proper national recipients. We will withhold donations that would otherwise go into these special national collections.

C. While we will not actively campaign at the moment for the withholding of donations to our local parishes, we do encourage the exercise of conscience and creativity.

The Diocese taxes all money donated to local parishes at 9%. Because so many parishioners are dedicated to supporting their own parishes, we are not presently targeting these parish donations. Rather this is a matter for the consciences of parishioners, many of whom have already made the painful but, for them, the necessary decision to stop donating to their local parishes.

We do not discourage this exercise of conscience.

We also do not discourage the exercise of creativity on the part of those parishioners who are finding and sharing novel ways of supporting their local parishes without making contributions that will result in the remittance of tax dollars to the Diocese.

Most dioceses in the United States release an audited financial statement, complete with the auditor's opinion, to the lay public.¹

While the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston will surely have more work to do than the typical American diocese, it should take note of the exemplary work of others. The Archdiocese

¹Voice of the Faithful, *Measuring and Ranking Diocesan Online Financial Transparency: 2018*; <http://www.votf.org/2018FWGReport.pdf>.

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of Boston, for example, provides not a perfect, but an admirably thorough, online financial report.²

To restore trust on the part of the lay faithful that their donations and other diocesan funds are being used for their intended purposes, we lay Catholics state that until and unless the Diocese hires a new, independent, and trustworthy auditor to audit the Diocese's finances and until and unless the Diocese announces a time line for conducting the audit and for releasing an independently audited financial statement, complete with the auditor's opinion, we will not donate money that would otherwise go to or through diocesan offices. We ask that you pledge the Diocese to this course of action now and announce a timetable for the completion of this work now.

Until and unless the diocese agrees to conduct an audit by an independent, trustworthy, and new auditor, release to the lay public an audited financial statement complete with the auditor's opinion, and lay out a timetable for the audit and the release, we will encourage all West Virginia Catholics to not donate money that would otherwise go to or through the Diocese.

Against all the facts, we have hope you will do this.

In the meantime, look for signs of our campaign to crop up all around West Virginia.

In the one body of Christ,

Lay Catholic Voices for Change

cc: DWC Finance Council
Bryan Minor
Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio
Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

²https://www.bostoncatholic.org/uploadedFiles/BostonCatholicorg/Offices_And_Services/Office_s/Sub_Pages/Finance_and_Technology/FY18/Corp_Sole_Annual_Report_FY18.pdf.