



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Diocese of Youngstown

September 19, 2024

Dear Staff and Faithful of Saint Patrick Parish, Hubbard,

Earlier this year, the Diocese of Youngstown was presented with concerns about the priestly ministry of Father Michael A. Swierz dating back to his time as a parochial vicar in the 1980s at Saint Rose Parish, Girard. I informed Father Swierz of these concerns and immediately, as per our policy, a preliminary investigation began. Based on the above information, and some additional contemporaneous evidence discovered by an internal review, I engaged independent outside counsel to conduct a thorough investigation.

Within the outside counsel investigation, Father Swierz made some admissions which established violations of Diocesan policy. This resulted in him resigning his pastorate at my request and being placed on Administrative Leave. Father Swierz has not been in ministry since June 17, 2024.

Following the completion of the outside counsel investigation, the findings were presented to the Independent Review Board whose task it is to review the findings and present to me a recommendation concerning a priest's suitability for ministry. The Board is comprised of mostly lay people, both Catholic and non-Catholic, who are not employed by the Diocese, in addition to one experienced and respected pastor of this Diocese. The Board members have areas of expertise regarding the protection of children, young people, and vulnerable adults. I greatly appreciate the efforts of these experts and am grateful for their service to the Church.

After a full review of all investigative materials along with discussion on the matter presented, the Board determined the information shared showed a disturbing pattern of behavior, including serious boundary violations with minors, manipulation, and abuse of power. The Independent Review Board unanimously agreed in its recommendation to me that Father Swierz is unsuitable for ministry and, therefore, should not be allowed to return to active ministry.

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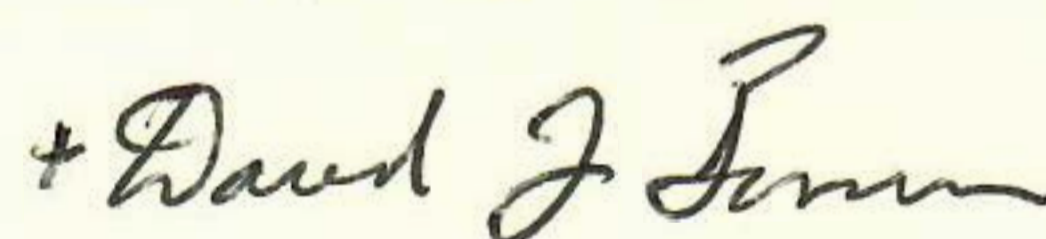
Under Canon law, I am bound by my Office as bishop to forward this case to the Holy See and the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith for review. Because this process is ongoing, and in respect of Father Swierz' canonical rights, I am unable to provide further comment on this matter.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul notes that when one member of the Body of Christ suffers all the parts of the body suffer with it. I know that this matter has been a source of great suffering for so many of us clergy, religious and faithful in this portion of the Lord's vineyard. The suffering for you, my dear faithful of Saint Patrick Parish, is compounded by what you have endured over these last few years with the fire to your beloved church building and the long wait to return to that sacred space to give fitting praise and worship to God. It is imperative in this difficult and painful moment that we all keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and behold his presence, for we believe that he is "the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

In your prayers and sacrifices, I ask you to remember all those who are suffering and in need of healing. I also ask your prayers for Father Michael Swierz. I also ask you to pray for all our priests, deacons, lay ecclesial ministers and church personnel that they might always behold the privilege to serve God's people. And please, I beg you, pray for me as your bishop that I might always aspire to be true to my calling as shepherd to lead, to feed, and to protect the flock entrusted to my care.

In his Letter to the Galatians Saint Paul says, "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up." (Gal. 6:9). In some translations it reads, "Let us not grow weary of doing what is right." What is right and good is not always easy or without pain or disruption. While this is a painful moment for so many of us, I believe along with the recommendation of the Independent Review Board, that this is the right course of action for the good of the Church. Be assured of my continued prayers and support and the pledge to always do what is right and good no matter the cost. Together, let us pray, "That All May Be One."

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ David J. Bonnar". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown

DJB/sdmp