



May 22, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I promised to release the final information about our Independent Survivors Reparation Program when it came to its conclusion. It has been a significant undertaking; I am now prepared to share the results with you and to offer perspective as your bishop and pastor.

I am grateful the diocese was able to create the fund, doing the best we could to provide some measure of justice and to express our deep sorrow to survivors for the trauma they endured. Survivor/victims have suffered through a significant ordeal. I know all of us, clergy and laity, have found these last few years difficult as well, witnessing the pain of those who were abused as well as realizing that people we looked up to were engaged in criminal and sinful activity. As hard as it was to learn of the details in the Grand Jury Report, it pales in comparison to what those who were abused endured.

When I made a public apology in 2018, I said it would be followed by action. We began by publishing an updated *Policy for the Protection of Children*, created with the assistance of law enforcement, legal and investigative experts in the field. It will remain under continuous review, and is available, along with other information about our efforts, at www.eriecd.org/childprotection.

The Office for the Protection of Children and Youth now has a full-time layperson working in close consultation with our vicar general. Our Public Disclosure List, naming people credibly accused of actions that, in the diocese's judgment, disqualify them from working with children, is available on our website.

One of the most important initiatives we created in response to the crisis was the Independent Survivors' Reparation Program (ISRP). We hope the fund provided closure and validation for those who participated. It is an essential component of our effort to address the emotional, psychological and pastoral needs of survivors of abuse.

We designed the fund to be as comprehensive as possible, open to people abused by both diocesan clergy and lay perpetrators affiliated not with just parishes, but also schools and agencies.

Beginning in February 2019, we opened a six-month window during which survivors were able to submit claims to the ISRP's independent administrators, experts in their field. The administrators reviewed the cases and offered financial settlements. A high percentage of applicants accepted their offers.

Claimants had the option of applying to the fund without a lawyer, thus avoiding payment of legal fees, which can be as much as 40 percent of their settlement. The Diocese of Erie provided for legal counsel on a *pro bono* basis with independent attorneys for any claimants who wanted that service.

In addition to a financial settlement, survivors who so desired were able to view the diocese's files concerning their cases. Even those who chose not to submit a claim were able to avail themselves of this option. This addresses an important concern raised by trial lawyers and survivors alike.

In addition to the news release with details about the fund that accompanies this letter, what follows are the final figures we can provide, including those we have released in the past.

We previously announced:

- Our best estimate is that \$750,000 had been paid in settlements and assistance over the history of the diocese prior to my tenure.
- \$4 million was spent to hire experts to review all of our files and to help create our new *Policy for the Protection of Children*.
- In 2019, we paid \$2 million as a settlement for an abuse case dating to the early 2000s.

Today we announce:

- Costs to complete the independent investigation of our files, essential to both the establishment of the ISRP and administration of the fund, totaled an additional \$8 million. As a result, for the first time we have a complete and updated understanding of this aspect of our history.
- Additionally, we have established an endowment with the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania so we can continue providing therapy for those who need it as well as assist with the costs of maintaining our Office for the Protection of Children and Youth and safe environment requirements.

We also are now able to provide a clearer picture of the timeframe in which the cases that have been reported to us occurred. Over 90 percent of the credible

allegations concern incidents that took place prior to 1990. Only one allegation concerns an incident that occurred after 2010, and the diocese willingly cooperated with law enforcement professionals. I say this to assure you that the protocols we have in place, including significant age-appropriate education initiatives, screenings and a clear pathway with several options for reporting abuse, are designed to create a safe environment for all and are proving to be effective.

The fund was financed through a line of credit obtained by the Diocese of Erie and secured by the diocese's own historic investments. No money donated by the faithful to the diocese's annual Catholic Services Appeal or to the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania was used for the fund. The operating budgets of parishes and schools also were not used to support the effort. No company that had insured the diocese for this purpose over several decades agreed to make any payments.

We are extremely fortunate that these funds are available to us as a result of generations of fiscal responsibility. This effort has been our top priority for several years. We have worked hard to honor our obligations to survivors as well as to the people who depend on our pastoral, charitable and educational works.

I am grateful for the time you have taken to read this letter, which I know is a complex and difficult topic. I hope you will find it helpful.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Lawrence T. Persico

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie