



2.15.19

Fund for abuse victims launched on behalf of Diocese of Erie

The Diocese of Erie today launched the Independent Survivors' Reparation Program to administer a fund for the benefit of survivors of sexual abuse. The full protocol is now available on the website of the fund administrators at www.ErieDioceseISRP.com. The diocesan website, www.ErieRCD.org, also provides a link to the independent site. The fund will be open for six months, from Feb. 15, 2019 through Aug. 15, 2019.

Earlier this month, the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, sent a personal letter to each of the abuse survivors who personally reported abuse and whose current address is known to the diocese, informing them that they would be receiving information regarding the fund. The fund administrators also have sent a packet to each of these survivors with the same information that is now available online. Survivors who did not receive a letter or who have never come forward before are welcome to submit a claim through the website.

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As Bishop Persico said in his December 2018 statement regarding the fund, it is his sincere hope that the establishment of the Diocese of Erie's Survivors' Reparation Program will provide some measure of justice, closure and validation for the terrible acts that victims endured. The fund is another important aspect of the bishop's and the diocese's ongoing efforts to address the emotional, psychological and pastoral needs of survivors of abuse, whether it was committed by a member of the clergy or by a layperson affiliated with the diocese.

Bishop Persico previously announced that the fund will be managed wholly independent of the diocese. Kenneth Feinberg, one of the nation's leading experts in mediation, has been retained to administer the fund. Mr. Feinberg and his team will conduct an independent assessment of each submitted claim, making compensation offers in a victim-centered and transparent distribution process designed for prompt payouts without the need for costly private lawyers or years-long litigation. Additional details about the fund can be obtained at the fund's website, www.ErieDioceseISRP.com, or through a link to Bishop Persico's Dec. 14, 2018 statement at <https://www.eriecd.org/Bishop-Persicos-statements.html>.

In addition to what is outlined in the protocol, Bishop Persico has arranged for two more features. First, any survivor who wishes to view the diocese's files concerning his or her case will be welcome to do so. A request for the relevant files should be made directly to the diocese's independent investigators at ErieRCD@KLGates.com.

"We know some people have voiced concerns that without a public trial, information about the past will still be hidden," Bishop Persico said. "That is not the case in the Diocese of Erie. Survivors will have the right to see files pertinent to their cases."

Second, claimants may apply to the fund with or without the assistance of a private attorney. While clients are free to hire their own attorney, the Diocese of Erie has asked its independent investigators at the K&L Gates law firm to arrange for lawyers outside of its firm

willing to serve in this capacity on a *pro bono* basis. As a result, survivors who prefer to collaborate with an attorney throughout the process will now have that option without incurring any costs. The list of third-party lawyers volunteering to advise survivors at no charge may be obtained by emailing ErieRCD@klgates.com. Every effort will be made to match lawyers who are geographically near the survivor and/or the area where the abuse occurred.

Money for Phase I of the Independent Survivors' Reparation Program will be provided through a new 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 any parish, school or charitable cause within the diocese, or to the diocese's annual Catholic Services Appeal, will be used in the fund. The feasibility of launching Phase II of the fund, which would potentially compensate estates of deceased victims and victims of non-diocesan personnel such as religious order priests, depends in large part on any future contributions by insurance companies and religious orders.

The full protocol of the Independent Survivors' Reparation Program managed by Kenneth Feinberg can be found at www.ErieDioceseISRP.com.

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