



5.8.18

**Statement from The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie,
regarding Father David Poulson**

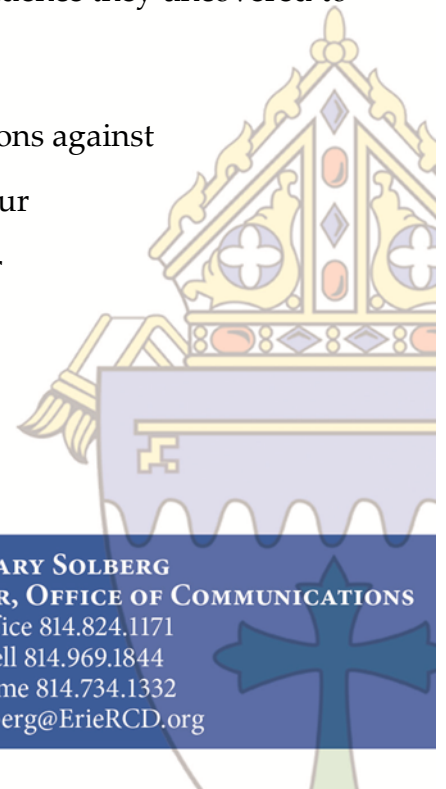
The Diocese of Erie learned today that Father David Poulson, 64, former pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Cambridge Springs, has been charged with one felony count of indecent assault; one felony count of endangering the welfare of children; one felony count of corruption of minors; two misdemeanor counts of indecent assault; and several misdemeanors. Father Poulson was arraigned on the charges in Jefferson County by District Judge Gregory M. Bazylak, and was placed in the Jefferson County Prison on \$300,000 bond. The diocese learned of the conduct that provides the basis for these charges in January 2018 and immediately notified law enforcement. Moreover, I directed K&L Gates law firm to assist in producing to the Attorney General's office any and all evidence they uncovered to assist in this prosecution.

I announced on Feb. 13 that I had received credible allegations against Father Poulson regarding the sexual abuse of minors. Following our *Policy for the Protection of Children*, I immediately turned the matter

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ANNE-MARIE WELSH
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Office 814.824.1167
Cell 814.746.6889
amwelsh@ErieRCD.org

MARY SOLBERG
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Office 814.824.1171
Cell 814.969.1844
Home 814.734.1332
msolberg@ErieRCD.org



over to law enforcement and have cooperated with the state attorney general throughout the process that led to today's arrest.

In February, I also accepted Father Poulson's permanent resignation as pastor of St. Anthony Parish, removed him from all other assignments, and prohibited him from any public ministry and from any contact with minors.

Learning the details of the behavior with which Father Poulson has been charged has been extremely upsetting. The victims involved have endured great suffering, and I know words cannot adequately express my sorrow in the face of such devastation. I realize the general public, and especially members of the church, including our priests, are outraged and confused by these horrendous acts. I want to provide you with a clear and thorough timeline of the events.

- ♦ I became Bishop of the Erie Diocese in October 2012. At that time and until the production of documents to the Grand Jury, Father Poulson's name was not raised. In 2016 and early 2017, the diocese produced records to the Grand Jury and undertook its own independent analysis through counsel. The 2010 report was flagged by the diocese's independent counsel as a case where grooming behaviors perhaps went undetected. The diocese informed the Attorney General that it would be reviewing Father Poulson and attempting to contact the former student at issue in the 2010 report (who declined to speak with anyone in 2010 after a third party reported suspicions). The Attorney General's Office did not object and indeed appreciated the diocese's cooperation and investigative efforts. In 2017, the former student did not return phone calls, e-mails, or certified letters (though his identity was confirmed and he did sign for the letters). Recognizing that disclosure must take place on a victim's terms, even the diocese's independent lawyers and investigators were at a standstill.
- ♦ As described in the Grand Jury's presentment, Victim #1 (not the former student that was the subject of the 2010 report) bravely came forward in January 2018 to a military chaplain to report abuse he suffered. This report was promptly provided to both state and local law enforcement.

The diocese informed the Attorney General that its counsel would confront Father Poulson and collect any available evidence. The Attorney General's Office did not object and again acknowledged the diocese's assistance. Diocesan counsel forensically imaged and later analyzed numerous electronic devices in addition to interviewing Father Poulson, with much of that information being discussed in the presentment. Indeed, the diocese located the cabin and provided text-message analysis and contact information for 21 potential victims to the Attorney General. The diocese publicly announced its suspension of Father Poulson after waiting for confirmation from state and local law enforcement that the suspension would not interfere with any law-enforcement investigation. The Grand Jury and the Attorney General then proceeded to uncover the details described in the presentment.

The diocese apologizes for the crimes of its priests/employees and has taken numerous steps to ensure that the sins of the past are not repeated by using trained independent investigators/lawyers, improving training on detecting grooming behaviors, centralizing abuse-reporting mechanisms, and understanding any missteps in detecting prior cases of abuse. The Diocese of Erie is fully committed to preventing, detecting, and reporting abuse in the best manner possible going forward.

This situation demonstrates why the revised *Policy for the Protection of Children* that we unveiled on April 6 calls for us to turn all allegations over to law enforcement for investigation.

We are committed to assisting victims on the long road to healing and wholeness, and this means offering and following a transparent, logical process. We echo the call of the State Attorney General to encourage anyone who may have additional knowledge of inappropriate or criminal activity, or who has been affected by similar improprieties, to use any of the options for reporting listed below.

Pastoral care and compassion for victims, as well as the protection of children and vulnerable adults, is a top priority of the Diocese of Erie. The diocese encourages anyone who has experienced sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy or any employee or volunteer of the church, to contact law enforcement. To report abuse to the independent investigators retained by the Diocese of Erie, email ErieRCD@KLGates.com. In addition, victims or concerned individuals can report abuse to ChildLine, an outreach of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, by calling 800-932-0313. The line is open 24/7, and callers may choose to remain anonymous. Victims also are welcome to contact the diocese directly to report abuse at 814.451.1543. Counseling assistance is available for victims and/or their families through the diocesan victim assistance coordinator, Dr. Robert Nelsen, who can be reached at 814.451.1521.