



NEWS RELEASE

DIOCESE OF ERIE

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**The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie,
statement regarding incident at Blessed Sacrament**

Last evening, at the end of the 7:30 pm Mass at Blessed Sacrament Parish, Erie, there was an incident involving a young man and some others attending Mass. Those present had many different experiences regarding the incident. Here are the facts we know:

According to the Erie Police Department, the 20-year-old man walked into the church wearing a hat under a hoodie.

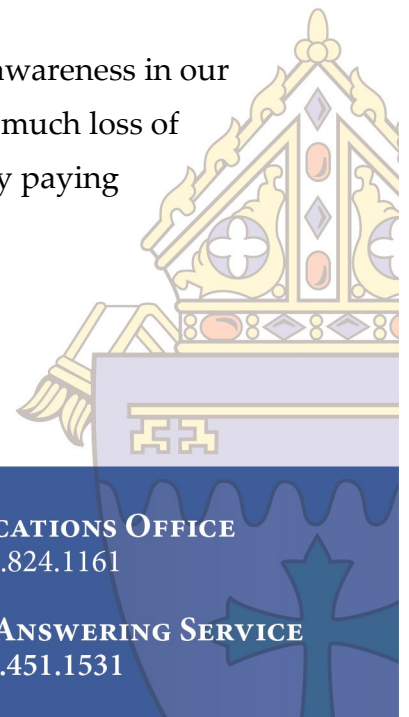
Witnesses say that as Mass came to an end, the young man was speaking with some parishioners who noticed he had a pocket knife and what appeared to be a gun in his pocket. One of the individuals speaking with the young man grabbed what turned out to be a BB gun and threw it to the ground. The young man did not brandish the knife or the gun and made no threats. He was held until police arrived and questioned him. The young man was found not to be a threat by the Erie Police Department and released. The District Attorney's Office has been made aware of the incident.

I thank God no one was hurt in this situation. There is a heightened awareness in our communities due to the many tragedies related to gun violence and to so much loss of life in our country, including in recent months. People are understandably paying attention and even taking action in situations that seem suspect.

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We pray for all of the people who attended Mass last evening — it was a frightening and confusing situation. We also pray for the young man involved.

Churches and other places of worship are as at risk as schools and businesses today. We are continually working to create safe and secure places where people can worship in peace and safety. On more than one occasion I have called for stricter gun laws. Until that occurs, people will remain on high alert. At the same time, I have said we must work to strengthen families and improve access to mental health care and early intervention.

I encourage all of us to be charitable and kind and to make sure information shared about this incident remains factual.

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