



8.26.2020

Statement regarding lawsuits filed in recent weeks

As the result of recent reports in the media, the Diocese of Erie issues the following statement:

The Diocese of Erie recently has been named in 31 lawsuits related to sexual abuse, similar to other cases filed in dioceses across Pennsylvania this summer. These cases do not involve any new allegations but, instead, relate to previous allegations dating back many years ago.

In June 2019, the state Superior Court ruled that the lawsuit of plaintiff Renée Rice, who sued the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown for fraud-based claims, could move forward. The Rice suit claims that an earlier grand jury report, issued in March 2016 and not involving the Diocese of Erie, demonstrated that the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese had covered up abuse. Two years later, in August 2018, the 40th Statewide Grand Jury Report was released, detailing past abuse in six other Pennsylvania dioceses, including Erie.

As in the Rice case, the recently filed lawsuits against the Diocese of Erie allege the 2018 report demonstrated that the Diocese of Erie, as well as other dioceses, had covered up abuse. Because the statute of limitations for fraud-based claims is two years, it appears that plaintiffs' counsel believed they had two years from the issuance of the 40th Statewide Grand Jury Report to file lawsuits against the Diocese of Erie pursuant to Rice.

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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
msolberg@ErieRCD.org

The Rice case now has been appealed to the state Supreme Court. Whether or not that case and those like it can move forward depends upon the ruling, which has not yet been given.

In its ongoing commitment to transparency, the Diocese of Erie acknowledges it is aware of the lawsuits and will continue to monitor the situation. It remains committed to addressing the needs of survivor-victims as well as to continuing its many ministries ranging from education and evangelization to charitable outreach efforts.

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