News



Baltimore Archbishop William Lori prays as he celebrates a Mass with special intentions for survivors of abuse and for abuse prevention in the chapel of the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington April 8, 2019. (CNS/Bob Roller)



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Baltimore Archbishop William Lori prays as he celebrates a Mass with special intentions for survivors of abuse and for abuse prevention in the chapel of the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington April 8, 2019. (CNS/Bob Roller)

After a major newspaper published a story about alleged financial and sexual misconduct by a West Virginia bishop, a prelate overseeing the investigation for the Vatican expressed regret that he redacted his name out of documents detailing financial aspects of the scandal.

In an 8-minute video released June 7, Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, who was tasked with overseeing the investigation in West Virginia, said mistakes were made and one of them was redacting his name, along with the names of other bishops and high-ranking church officials who received personal financial "gifts" from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's former bishop, Bishop Michael Bransfield.

Lori, who was appointed apostolic administrator of the West Virginia diocese after Bransfield resigned last fall amid allegations of sexual and financial misconduct, said in the video that transparency requires admitting mistakes.

"If I had to do it over again, especially at a time when we're trying to create greater transparency and accountability, the report would have included the names of those bishops who received gifts, including my own, with some notation that there was no evidence to suggest that those who received gifts reciprocated in any way that was inappropriate."

The preliminary investigation, he said, found that allegations of sexual misconduct by Bransfield toward adults were found to be "credible" and it also determined that "during his tenure, he engaged in patterns of excessive and inappropriate spending, misused church funds for personal benefit," that included travel, liquor, dining, financial gifts and luxury goods.

"There is no excuse nor adequate explanation that will satisfy the troubling question of how Bishop Bransfield's behavior was allowed to continue for as long as it did without the accountability that we must require from those who have been entrusted with so much, both spiritual and material, as pastors," Lori said.

The Baltimore archbishop faced scrutiny after The Washington Post daily newspaper published a story June 5 that said Lori had been one of several bishops and high-ranking officials who had received financial gifts from Bransfield and whose named was redacted from the report.

Others the Post said had received the financial gifts included Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who recently retired as Washington's archbishop; New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan; U.S. Cardinal Raymond Burke; Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó, a former apostolic nuncio to the United States; Cardinal Kevin Farrell, a former bishop of Dallas who is now prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life at the Vatican, who received thousands for matters related to an apartment in Rome, the newspaper reported.

Lori said he has returned the amount of the gifts he received, $7,500, to the West Virginia diocese and asked that it be donated to Catholic Charities in the state.

Lori said he was asked to oversee the preliminary investigation commissioned by the Vatican, which now has all the information that was gathered.

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"Those findings go directly to the Holy See for further judgment and action of the Holy Father," he said in the video.

The Vatican has not announced what action, if any, it will take. Lori said he could not address the matter before without permission and that was not granted "until this week." He said he is working with members of the financial council in the West Virginia diocese to assess lapses in financial control and to "revive good practices" to ensure a similar incident does not occur again.

In addition to the credible allegations of sexual harassment of adults, he said, the investigation found evidence of an "unhealthy culture that the former bishop created."

He said he was praying for the religious community affected, for the diocese's priests, deacons, laity, and religious, "for the appointment of a new shepherd for that diocese and for one that will embody Christ's spirit of humility, compassion, care and concern, and service."

"Friends, this cannot happen soon enough," he added. "We will not relent in our determined efforts to bring about the reform and renewal of the church and to restore the credibility, confidence and trust of the faithful in those of us who were charged with the awe-inspiring responsibility to lead, shepherd and, most of all, to serve with true Christ-like humility, care and concern for others."