News
Vatican



Bishop Michael J. Bransfield of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, is seen in this 2012 file photo. On July 19 the Vatican announced disciplinary measures for the bishop, who retired in 2018 amid allegations of sexual misconduct and financial improprieties. (CNS photo/Catholic Spirit/Tim Bishop)



by Peter Feuerherd

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Pope Francis formally disciplined Bishop Michael J. Bransfield, former bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, for financial crimes and sexual harassment. The sanctions were announced July 19 by the office of Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the apostolic nuncio based in Washington.

The sanctions, announced on the diocesan website, state that Bransfield cannot reside in the diocese, which covers the entire state of West Virginia, is prohibited from public celebration of Mass, and is obliged "to make personal amends for some of the harm he caused." The exact nature of the reparations will be determined by the future bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, the statement said.

Bransfield retired from the diocese last year when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 75 for bishops. The diocese is now being administered by Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, who appointed a commission to investigate alleged wrongdoing by Bransfield.

That commission reported that Bransfield was responsible for extravagant spending, including more than $4 million spent on house renovations, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on gifts to other bishops and priests, paid for by diocesan funds. The report, released in June, also described as credible charges of sexual harassment by Bransfield involving seminarians and priests.

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