News



Bishop Richard Malone of Buffalo, N.Y., is seen at the headquarters of U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington Jan. 17, 2018. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)



by Catholic News Service

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BUFFALO, N.Y. — September 4, 2019
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This story has been updated with more information at 01.30 pm, Eastern Time on September 5

Bishop Richard Malone of Buffalo said the majority of priests and parishioners in the diocese supported him and he would not resign over his handling of a situation involving two priests' relationship with a seminarian.

"I'm here because I feel an obligation as the one who was sent here to lead this diocese, to carry on, and once again, if I thought the majority of Catholic people in particular were calling for my resignation, that would be a different story," Malone said during Sept. 4 news conference in Buffalo.

"But I don't feel that. I go out to parishes and schools all the time for visits. I am always well received when I go ... I do feel enough support, honestly to continue on," he told reporters gathered at the rectory of St. Joseph's Cathedral.

Malone called the news conference to discuss a letter from Fr. Ryszard Biernat to a seminarian, Matthew Bojanowski, and allegations by Bojanowski that another priest, Fr. Jeffrey Nowak, harassed him.

Biernat began a leave of absence from his position as the bishop's priest secretary Aug. 14. He had been in his position since 2013.

In a recording obtained from Biernat by WKBW-TV, Malone is heard saying that he feared having to resign over what he called a "love triangle" involving priests and a seminarian.

Malone also expressed concern to Biernat that "this could be the end for me as bishop" if the news media learned about the situation involving the three men and called the situation he was facing "a true crisis."

The television station posted a transcript of the recording on its website.

The beleaguered bishop has faced questions about how he has handled allegations of abuse against diocesan priests for more than a year.

Bojanowski, who has withdrawn from Christ the King Seminary in suburban Aurora, said he first notified Malone in November 2018 of the allegation against Nowak. The diocese announced in an Aug. 28 statement that Nowak had been placed on administrative leave.

During the news conference, Malone said he thought the conversation with Biernat was confidential and expressed concern that the recording was made public.

The bishop also defended his handling of what he described as "a very complex, convoluted matter."

He said Nowak had not been accused of engaging in sexual contact with an adult or child and that the diocese was unaware of any activity that endangered parishioners or the public. He said he placed Nowak on leave when the priest refused to seek a behavioral assessment at St. Luke Institute, which serves priests, deacons and consecrated religious.

The situation involving the two priests and the former seminarian has its roots in a July 2016 letter from Biernat to Bojanowski in which he discusses his love for the student. Nowak photographed the letter without Bojanowski's permission, the Buffalo News reported.

Malone explained that the two priests had been friends and that Nowak had mentored Bojanowski as he discerned a vocation to the priesthood. After Bojanowski met Biernat, he began spending more time with him.

"Matthew's relationship with Nowak cooled you might say, and this was disturbing to Nowak," the bishop explained. "Fr. Nowak secretly photographed the letter he found in Matthew's apartment in Boston, when he was there. This was several years ago."

The bishop called the content of the letter "a bit concerning" and said he "suggested that Fr. Ryszard should go on a personal leave of absence."

The newspaper said the letter suggested that Biernat and Bojanowski were involved in a romantic relationship. However, Malone said he was "not aware at this time of an allegations of sexual impropriety between Ryszard and Matthew."

Attorney Barry Covert, representing Biernat and Bojanowski, told the newspaper that Malone was trying to distract people from his failure to remove Nowak in a timely manner.

"There's not love triangle," Covert said. "That's a complete deflection."

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A version of this story appeared in the **Sept 20-Oct 3, 2019** print issue under the headline: Bishop Malone will not resign, calls recent case 'convoluted'.