



A combination photo shows undated file photos of the exterior of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in North Huntingdon, Pa., and Immaculate Conception Church in Irwin, Pa. Bishop Larry J. Kulick and the Diocese of Greensburg has asked law enforcement to investigate a potential conspiracy involving the pastor and other employees of the two affiliated parishes to cover up the criminal history of a parish employee who is now charged with sexual assault of a minor. (OSV News/courtesy Diocese of Greensburg)

Gina Christian

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A Pennsylvania diocese has asked police to investigate after parish staff — overseen by a beloved pastor — possibly concealed a now-former employee's criminal record, which includes a recent arrest on charges involving sexual offenses against a minor, as well as charges dating back to 2001-2002 for lewdness, indecent exposure and drug possession.

Bishop Larry J. Kulick of Greensburg has sought the Westmoreland County (Pa.) Detective Bureau's help in determining whether employees at two affiliated parishes — St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in North Huntingdon and Immaculate Conception in Irwin — conspired to hide glaring disqualifications for safe environment clearance for Shon M. Harrity of North Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

The move was announced in a statement issued by the diocese May 28, which also noted that Father John A. Moineau has resigned effective immediately as pastor of both St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Immaculate Conception "for the good of the parishes," the statement said, and he also will begin medical leave June 17. In the summer of 2021, the popular priest announced he had been diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer that had spread to his liver and caused a blood clot in his abdomen.

Three unspecified employees from both parishes will be placed on paid administrative leave pending the outcome of the county detectives' investigation, said the diocese. In addition, Kulick has opened a required preliminary investigation under canon law to assess whether the case demonstrated culpable negligence for actions or omissions resulting in harm or scandal.

The 47-year-old Harrity, who until recently had worked as a groundskeeper at Immaculate Conception Parish Cemetery, was arrested May 8 by North Huntingdon police on multiple charges including rape, sexual and indecent assault, and other sexual offenses against a minor. He is set to be arraigned June 19 in Westmoreland County (Pennsylvania) Court, and was released from custody after posting bail May 28.

Cemetery director Jerry Kunkle told OSV News he was "crushed" and "shocked" by news of Harrity's recent arrest, describing his former employee as a "good worker" and a "good person."

"I can usually read people pretty good, but this one was well hid from me," said Kunkle.

Harrity's attorney, Patrick J. Thomassey, explained to OSV News that the eight felony and three misdemeanor charges against his client involve a minor and relate to alleged offenses committed in January 2022. Thomassey said that Harrity has returned home after posting bail.

Both the diocese and Melanie Jones, public information officer for the Westmoreland County District Attorney’s office, confirmed to OSV News that the charges against Harrity relate to incidents that allegedly took place off site from the parish, which is served by a regional Catholic school located in Irwin.

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However, Kulick said in the diocesan statement that he was "outraged" Harrity had been employed by the two parishes since 2012, as Harrity had "a criminal record … that should have automatically disqualified him from employment around children."

Harrity had served prison time and received probation after pleading guilty to a string of offenses between 2001 and 2002 that included indecent exposure, lewdness, disorderly conduct, driving under the influence, marijuana possession, fraud and forgery.

It is unclear why such charges were not initially flagged when he began work at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in 2012, given that the U.S. bishops began establishing safe environment programs after 2002 with the adoption of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." Pennsylvania's Criminal History Record Information Act, which took effect in 1980, specified the ways in which employers could use criminal history in making hiring decisions, attesting to a longstanding practice of vetting potential employees.

But an FBI fingerprint check that pulled up the 2001-2002 charges "clearly disqualified" Harrity when he went to transfer from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to Immaculate Conception Parish Cemetery, said the diocese in its statement.

Although that file "was sent by electronic mail" during Harrity's 2023 move to Immaculate Conception, the safe environment coordinator at that parish "did not

flag the file," said the diocese, adding that an audit conducted last week revealed "several required clearance documents were missing from the file."

Despite that gap, Moineau had "previously attested to the validity of all clearances in his parishes, signing a letter to the Bishop that he personally reviewed them," said the diocese.

"I am beyond disappointed that our tireless efforts to raise the bar on safe environment training, required clearances and transparency were blatantly disregarded," said Kulick in the diocesan statement. "This is exactly why we assign a safe environment coordinator in every parish and every school and every administrative office in the Diocese of Greensburg."

He said that Moineau is "deeply remorseful" and has acknowledged his failure of oversight.

At the time of his 2020 appointment to the diocese, Kulick pledged to "work tirelessly" to implement and refine safe environment protocols in the wake of a devastating 2018 Pennsylvania grand jury report that detailed extensive clerical sex abuse and cover-up in six of the state's dioceses, including Greensburg.

Now, Kulick said he plans to "implement additional safeguards," and has ordered "all priests and administrators … to personally review each employee and volunteer file in their parishes" within the next seven days, along with their required annual review of the files.

Over the summer, the diocesan human resources office will conduct a separate audit of clearances in all of its 78 parishes and 12 Catholic schools, said the bishop, who also added mandatory sessions for safe environment training for all clergy and all employees.

"Pastors and safe environment coordinators will receive a personal message from me: after these trainings, I will assure them, they will be held accountable for any administrative errors," Kulick said in the statement.

While state law requires updated clearances every five years, "I won't wait that long," he said. "From this point forward, any employee or volunteer who is transferring positions between offices, parishes or schools will be required to renew their clearances and trainings, even if the documents are current."

“My prayers are with the victim and those impacted by the heinous acts alleged to have taken place," said Kulick in the diocesan statement, noting that with the measures he has taken to address the situation will likely invite criticism.

"I may live the rest of my life as the Bishop of the Diocese of Greensburg who asked one of our most popular and beloved priests to resign," said Kulick. "But I have a responsibility to the people of this diocese. I will not hide our mistakes. And I will root out any and all potential risks to the safety of children."

Editor's note: *This story has been revised by OSV News in order to better protect the identity of a minor victim.*