



April 7, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As you are most likely aware, the Diocese of Erie on Friday announced one of the most significant updates to its 32-year-old *Policy for the Protection of Children*. This was a complex but important undertaking.

I extend my deepest sorrow and apologies for the sexual abuse that has occurred within the Catholic Church, particularly here in our own diocese. I have met with victims and listened to their agonizing stories. Abuse is traumatic enough, but when it is perpetrated by someone in a position of trust, it is earth-shattering. At stake is one's abiding faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Since 1986, the Diocese of Erie has vigorously worked to protect young people through its *Policy for the Protection of Children*, last revised in 2016. After much research and prayer—and guided by the commitment to create a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults—the diocese has made a significant revision to that policy, which will become effective July 1, 2018.

The updated *Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth* features several new components, specifically:

- An expanded set of definitions that leave no doubt as to what constitutes abuse (sexual, physical, emotional and neglectful).
- The Office for the Protection of Children and Youth will become the central depository of all allegations from any school, agency, parish or other source connected to the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Erie. In addition to state clearances as a condition of working with children in the diocese, employees and volunteers who enter into positions working with children also will need a clearance from the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth.

Names of clergy and laypeople—living and deceased, who have received credible allegations of abuse while serving in the diocese or are otherwise disqualified from working with young people—will be published. These same individuals will be barred from working with children and youth in any parish, school, or agency in the diocese.

You can find the entire policy, the statements from our news conference and additional information at [www.ErieRCD.org/policyupdate.htm](http://www.ErieRCD.org/policyupdate.htm).



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The decision to publish these names—34 priests and 17 lay people—was not made lightly. I do so with the support of legal counsel and members of the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Review Board. It is time to bring Christ's healing light to those who have suffered abuse and to take additional proactive steps to protect our young people.

I know some people may disagree with the decision to publish these names, especially those who have died. As Catholics, we believe in God's infinite mercy and absolution for those who are contrite and seek forgiveness. But that doesn't mean those who have committed offenses are free from the consequences of their actions. Many of their victims, including those we may not be aware of at this time, continue to struggle.

This is a sobering moment for all of us, and our diocese may face more difficult moments as it awaits a report from the grand jury investigating abuse here and in five other dioceses in Pennsylvania. First and foremost, I ask you to pray for the victims of abuse and give them your utmost respect and support as they confront the effects of their devastating experiences.

I encourage anyone who has experienced sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy or any employee or volunteer of the church to contact law enforcement. To report abuse to the independent investigators retained by the Diocese of Erie, email [ErieRCD@KLGates.com](mailto:ErieRCD@KLGates.com).

In addition, victims or concerned individuals can report abuse to ChildLine, an outreach of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, by calling 800-932-0313. The line is open 24/7, and callers may choose to remain anonymous. Victims also are welcome to contact the Diocese directly to report abuse at 814-451-1543. Counseling assistance is available for victims and/or their families through the diocesan victim assistance coordinator, Dr. Robert Nelsen, who can be reached at 814-451-1521.

Please know that the diocese—through its schools, parishes and agencies—continues to be vigilant in providing a safe and caring environment for our children. Our mission is to help these young people become healthy, contributing adults filled with God's love and joy.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence T. Persico".

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico  
Bishop of Erie