

Response by Victim VGD to Bransfield's, Catholic Bishops' Statements on Abuse and Reconciliation

In response to the many statements made recently but especially last week by former bishop [Michael Bransfield](#), Bishop [Mark Brennan](#), Archbishop [William Lori](#) and others, as a fellow Catholic who shares the sincere desire for healing and reconciliation between all members of our church, and as a victim of former bishop Bransfield's abuse, I am issuing the following statement.

While I have previously said, and maintain, that perhaps nothing can do as much to bring about healing and reconciliation in our church as a good apology, I have to note that:

1) Michael Bransfield's attempt at apology and reconciliation is, in our Catholic Tradition, inadequate and unsatisfactory.

Unfortunately, former bishop Bransfield's letter does not meet the basic conditions of Catholic contrition, or apology, specifically in the context of reconciliation. In the Catholic tradition, we do not apologize for actions "attributed to" us or for hypothetical "ifs."

2) Despite public [statements](#) suggesting otherwise, Michael Bransfield did not reach out privately to apologize to me or other victims of his with whom I exchange support.

What's more, for the Catholic Church, overseeing Metropolitan Archbishop Lori, and/or Bishop Brennan to empower Bransfield to have this kind of control of selection over us victims again is hurtful in the same way it was hurtful when Bransfield first exerted his control and selection over us, and is similarly reminiscent of the hurtful control of selection I experienced when my attempts to meet with and discuss my experiences were canceled and refused by the metropolitan investigator. These are realities to respond to, not selections bishops get to pick or not.

3) Statements of apology and promises of accountability for clergy sex abuse more generally only further prove empty and disingenuous when Bishop Brennan, Archbishop Lori, and collectively the members of the congregation of bishops at this very moment oppose all the way to the supreme court simple accountability and justice for my own victimization by Bransfield, as they have others.

I have said, and I maintain, that I would not be seeking legal recourse if justice would be done by my church. I went to the metropolitan investigator, asked to meet, and was turned away. But even if not for me there may still have been hope as the Metropolitan investigation found credible financial abuse, found credible sexual abuse, substantiated allegations of sexual misconduct with minors. But then knowing this his fellow bishops choose to protect Bransfield as a bishop? Instead of punishment, they have us pay him? What am I supposed to do? I can only do my part, like so many have done before me. And I will try to do it - seek justice, seek accountability, seek healing, seek to help end abuse, seek to help repair the church I love. Even as repeatedly, the bishops in charge, the conference of bishops, delay, draw out, and stay my case, file on procedure, appeal to the supreme court - while at the same time telling us to "[move on](#)." That is the language of perpetuating abuse, it is the language of cover-up. I have been told by another of persistence in prayer and justice.

So, I appreciate Michael Bransfield's efforts and sincerely encourage him to continue making progress towards true Catholic contrition and reconciliation, and I am hopeful for the healing this might bring.

However, the statement by Michael Bransfield in cooperation with the Catholic Bishops issued on Aug 15 and made public Aug 20 is more than noteworthy in the contradictions of its apology, it is alarming in that Bransfield and the bishops involved continue to not only disregard, but openly flout the Catholic Church's efforts to bring accountability for clergy sexual abuse, especially of high ranking prelates.

It is concerning that even today, Michael Bransfield, Bishop Brennan, and the overseeing Metropolitan Archbishop Lori continue to publicly defy the Catholic Church's sex abuse accountability measures regarding:

- I) Explicit Directives Against Bransfield's Episcopal, or "Bishop," Reference and/or Use. And,**
- II) The Zero-Tolerance Policy for Clergy Sexual Abuse of Minors.**

I) Use of Bransfield's Episcopal, or Bishop's, Office, Title, and Power

"Nor should he [Bransfield] be permitted to use the title of 'Bishop' in any public or private settings."

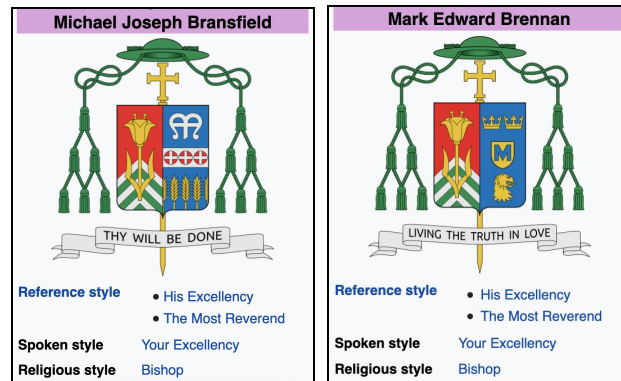
-[Bransfield Report](#) by Metropolitan Archbishop Lori, page 4 and 55

"We recommend that Bishop Bransfield be stripped of the title and powers that allowed him to engage in this sexually harassing and intimidating conduct."

-[Bransfield Report](#) by Metropolitan Archbishop Lori, page 55

Metropolitan Archbishop William Lori's investigation found that Michael Bransfield used his office of Roman Catholic Bishop to perpetrate financial and sexual abuse, and as such explicitly directs that it no longer be used either by or in reference to Michael Bransfield.

In his Aug 15, 2020 "apology" letter, Michael Bransfield publicly flouts Archbishop Lori's investigation and directives by publicly presenting himself as a Roman Catholic bishop, using both the formal reference reserved for Catholic bishops, "The Most Reverend," and using his own Bishop's Coat of Arms, just as Bishop Brennan or Archbishop Lori does.



What's more, the current Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, Bishop Mark Brennan, in his official ecclesial, or church, [statement](#) also directly contradicts the explicit directives of Metropolitan Archbishop William Lori's Vatican-ordered investigative report and refers to Michael Bransfield repeatedly and exclusively - five times - as "Bishop Bransfield."

Why investigate clergy sex abuse if high ranking clerics will so blatantly disregard and defy them?
Is this the metropolitan model that is supposed to end the Catholic clergy abuse crisis at the highest levels?

As one who experienced and was victimized by this very abuse of the office and public power of "Bishop" by Michael Bransfield, these direct, public, and deliberate violations of the abuse-preventing directives of Archbishop Lori's investigative report, and instead the reassertion of the very power with which Bransfield repeatedly abused are simply terrifying.

For the Catholic Church to knowingly give abusive people the power to abuse, is for the Catholic Church to perpetuate, and indeed sanction, clergy sexual abuse.

II) Tolerance for Clergy Sexual Abuse of Minors

"We did not find conclusive evidence that Bishop Bransfield committed sexual misconduct with minors; however, there is significant reason for concern that this occurred."

-[Bransfield Report](#) by Metropolitan Archbishop Lori, page 28

"We believe that this matter [the Lansdale Catholic case] may warrant further inquiry as the inconsistencies in the victim's statement that are highlighted in the [2012 Philadelphia] report are typical in these types of cases when a substantial amount of time has passed between the alleged abuse and the report."

-[Bransfield Report](#) by Metropolitan Archbishop Lori, page 29

Still perhaps most concerning however, is the continued tolerance and indeed acceptance by the Catholic Church of what are now several allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Michael Bransfield. Specifically, it is truly unfathomable that the Catholic Church upholds and cooperates with Michael Bransfield despite the first of these allegations being repeatedly substantiated, by both the victim and even church bodies including:

- The Lansdale Catholic High School Bransfield victim - who has consistently and unwaveringly maintained his dignity and testimony for more than 43 years, including being roundly ignored for 13 years after he first reported this wrong to the Catholic Church as early as 2005-07.
- Archbishop Lori's Investigation of Bransfield - which found "significant reason for concern" that sexual misconduct with minors occurred.
- The Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program (IRRP) - in dealings, offers, and acknowledgements with this victim for his claim from when he was a Lansdale Catholic High School student.

This victim did his part; he reported as early as 2005-07 just as Bransfield got the episcopal power he used to abuse. Imagine if the bishops, archbishops, and/or metropolitans who received these reports did their part. How much harm could have been prevented? How much abuse stopped? How many church resources could have addressed needs? How many vocations would have been realized? How much moral standing, Catholics' trust, our faith could have gone unbroken and preserved?

If the Catholic Church is going to claim and promote "Zero-Tolerance" for clergy sexual abuse of minors, and if they expect their lists of clergy credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors to be taken seriously, then the Church must follow to their just conclusions the truths that their own reports, restitution programs, and members have revealed.

The overseeing Metropolitan, Archbishop Lori, while maintaining Bransfield's episcopal office, has prohibited Michael Bransfield from being in West Virginia as if this is a solution. Should I simply never visit the Liberty Bell? What about Bransfield's Philadelphia victims - their children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren going to Catholic school and church there? Are they obliged to kiss "The Most Reverend" serial-sexual-predator "Bishop" Michael J. Bransfield's episcopal ring? Are we supposed to simply sleep well at night crossing our fingers and just hoping that the re-empowered "bishop" Bransfield doesn't get drunk and call us in the middle of the night, again? Or text us in the middle of the night, again?

Again, knowingly giving abusive clerics the power to abuse makes you jointly responsible for their abuse. More than just a saying on a USCCB poster at the back of our churches, we Catholics have a responsibility to protect children from clergy sexual abuse of minors. Zero Tolerance.

Wednesday, Aug 26, 2020

In closing, in the larger context of our time grappling with this abuse in our church, we can take inventory - we had the Dallas Charter, yet we had McCarrick, we now have the Metropolitan Model, and yet we have Bransfield.

We can keep waiting for a scrubbed McCarrick report, or we can simply watch Bransfield unfold. We can watch our bishops, and metropolitans, and clerics demonstrate on Bransfield when after you get caught - how to give gifts, how to make payments, how to promote your proteges, auxiliaries, and successors, how to bury and defy an abuse report, how to redact your own names, how to get away with it.

To understand McCarrick watch his proteges, papal foundation successor Michael Bransfield and elevated auxiliary bishop William Lori, and now Lori's former auxiliary bishop Mark Brennan.

If Catholic clergy sex abuse is resultant from a lack of power at the highest levels over the vulnerable, then by all means solve it by consolidating more power up to clerics and metropolitan archbishops. But if the abuse crisis is resultant from an excess of power of those clerics over the vulnerable, then remedy it by sharing that power down, between clerics and the very lay people, victims, and experts who are best suited to protect their own bodies, children, and church from abusive clerics.

Until the Catholic Church can meet it's own commitments and Sacramental duty to administer simple justice for clergy sexual abuse, including for high ranking clerics, I and other victims of Bransfield and other clerics will continue to work for justice trusting our legal system, with the hope that some day justice can be found into our church.

In persistent prayer, action, and hope for our Church,
-VGD