



## **SAINT VINCENT ARCHABBEY**

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### **SAINT VINCENT ARCHABBEY STATEMENT ON THE CLOSURE OF SAINT BENEDICT PARISH IN BALTIMORE**

LATROBE, PENNSYLVANIA—On Thursday, October 12, 2023, the Archdiocese of Baltimore and Saint Vincent Archabbey were made aware of a settlement that had been entered into by Benedictine Father Paschal Morlino in 2018. The settlement agreement was with an adult—now deceased—who claimed that Father Morlino engaged in improper employment practices with him and alleged an act of sexual assault. The adult and Father Morlino signed a non-disclosure agreement, and the settlement did not contain any admission of responsibility by Father Morlino and he denies any alleged impropriety. The paperwork was discovered and subsequently revealed by a friend of the deceased. It was the first time that both the Archdiocese and the Archabbey learned of the allegations.

The Archdiocese decided within 24 hours to remove Father Morlino as pastor of Saint Benedict Church in southwest Baltimore. Father Morlino's priestly faculties were suspended by the Archdiocese and he returned to the Archabbey in Latrobe immediately. The removal was unrelated to any allegation of child sexual abuse.

For more than 125 years, the Archdiocese of Baltimore has entrusted the spiritual care of the parishioners of Saint Benedict Parish to the Benedictines. Around the time Father Morlino—now 85—reached his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Archabbey informed the Archdiocese of Baltimore that due to the declining number of priests, it would not be able to continue ministering in southwest

Baltimore beyond Father Paschal's tenure. With his recent ineligibility, the Archabbey had to return the pastoral care of parishioners back to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as had been planned for more than a decade.

In an announcement made by the Archdiocese on October 15, 2023, a statement was made that "The Archdiocese will appoint a new administrator to oversee Saint Benedict Church, which is owned and operated by the Benedictines."

With that in mind, the Archabbey began work on formulating a plan to continue many of the services that the parish provides to its parishioners and members of the local community as the Benedictine Society of Baltimore is the organization that owns the physical plant of Saint Benedict Parish.

The parish where Father Morlino served for 39 years was not known solely for its crucial ministerial functions of Mass, the Sacraments and worship services. It was also known for its many community outreach programs which have been staffed and operated entirely by volunteers and have been critical in serving the needs of the poor in the area. These programs include Benedict's Pantry, WVTO Radio, a setting for Saint Philomena Homeschool, Lumina Theatre Evangelization, Head Start, and a basketball camp. The parish facilities also served as a meeting space for Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Southwestern District Police, the Mill Hill Neighborhood Association and Violetville Senior Bingo.

The parishioners of Saint Benedict parish embraced this mission to the poor in a most admirable way. The entire parish was run by volunteers who helped organize all of these critical activities. Many of the parishioners did not live in the area of the parish but nonetheless wholeheartedly supported these noble activities.

On the evening of Thursday, November 2, the Benedictines held an online meeting with the various volunteers of Saint Benedict Parish, in the hopes of continuing these important ministries, regardless of pastoral staffing. Many possibilities were suggested as a means of continuing Benedictine ministry to the needy of the local area. One idea that emerged from that online meeting was to develop a center similar to that of the St. Francis Neighborhood Center (<https://www.stfranciscenter.org/>) founded by the Jesuits to serve the residents of the Reservoir Hill neighborhood of Baltimore, and which has been met with great success. Of course, this possibility would not address the sacramental needs of parishioners but would enable Saint Benedict's proud legacy of care for the needy to continue.

The Archdiocese released a statement regarding limited ministries at Saint Benedict Parish. The statement (<https://www.archbalt.org/press-release-11-04-23-b/>) released by the Archdiocese on Saturday, November 4, noted that “The Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, PA and Archdiocese of Baltimore announce that a pastor will not be named for Saint Benedict Church in Baltimore. Sadly, because of this, the number of ministries will be limited going forward. The difficult decision was made based on the limited number of clergy available for this ministry. St. Benedict Church is owned and operated by the Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, PA. Regrettably, the decision also means that Mass, the Sacraments, sacramental preparation, and worship services will no longer continue at St. Benedict Church, effective on November 15, 2023.”

The phrase “St. Benedict Church is owned and operated by the Saint Vincent Archabbey” may have caused some misunderstanding. While the buildings and grounds are owned by Saint Vincent, as was the custom when the parish was founded in 1893, the Parish, like all Roman Catholic parishes, is canonically the responsibility of the local bishop. Religious orders, like the Benedictines, minister at parishes by episcopal appointment and serve at the bishop’s discretion as they are able to provide priests.

On Friday, November 3, both the Archdiocese and the Archabbey were notified of a new allegation, of sexual abuse of a minor against Father Morlino, which allegedly occurred sometime in or around 1993, an allegation which Father Morlino categorically denies. The Archdiocese immediately reported the allegation to law enforcement. The following day the Archdiocese released a statement (<https://www.archbalt.org/press-release-11-04-23/>). The statement noted, in part, that “this matter is in an early stage of investigation, and thus no determination of credibility has been made by the Archdiocese at this time. However, the Archdiocese is making this communication in order to solicit any relevant information as part of its investigation and in order to fulfill its commitment to open communication with affected communities. Father Morlino served at St. Benedict Church from July 1984 to October 2023.”

The Archabbey was unaware of the release of this announcement and was not provided a copy of this final statement prior to its release, and thus was unable to generate a response prior to both announcements being read at this past weekend’s Masses, including Father Morlino’s adamant denial of the abuse of a minor allegation. The Archabbey regrets that the release of the “limited ministries” announcement occurred at the same time as the announcement of an

allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by Father Morlino and that it may have caused confusion regarding its intentions with the physical plant of Saint Benedict Parish.

As far as the allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by Father Morlino, the Archabbey will adhere to both state and federal statutes related to the protection of minors. The Archabbey reports any allegations of sexual abuse of minors to the appropriate officials in the jurisdiction in which they occur. The allegation has been reported to the appropriate authorities by the Archdiocese, and the Archabbey will cooperate with this and any other investigation regarding Father Morlino.

Additionally, the Archabbey's delegate for the protection of children investigates and documents all complaints of alleged child abuse for action of the Archabbey Review Board, which is comprised of independent outside individuals, including a retired judge, civil lawyer, canon lawyer, pediatrician, child psychologist and retired law enforcement officer. The Archabbey also provides support for victims to receive professional counseling in the healing process through a survivor assistance coordinator. The Archabbey is accredited by Praesidium, Inc., a nationally recognized, independent organization that specializes in the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

It is the policy of Saint Vincent Archabbey that sexual misconduct or abuse of any type involving a child by any member of the Benedictine Community shall not be tolerated under any circumstances. For additional details refer to <https://saintvincentarchabbey.org/child-protection/>.

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