



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on November 27, 2019

## Disgraced Bishop Must Repay Nearly \$800K to West Virginia Diocese

Michael J. Bransfield, the jet-setting bishop who ran the Catholic diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, from 2005 through 2018, better have some money in the bank.

His successor, Bishop Mark Brennan, just handed him a bill for nearly \$1 million to repay the money he expended in what amounted to a 13-year campaign of embezzlement, although Bransfield has not been charged with the crime.



During his time as the top Catholic in Wheeling-Charleston, Bransfield lived the life of a high-flying globe-trotter, using private jets and limousines and staying at swank hotels from Positano, Italy, to Palm Beach, Florida.

Now, Brennan says, it's time to pay up.

### Defrocked

The trouble for Bransfield began when he resigned last year after [he was accused](#) of molesting altar boys and seminarians and, as well, looting the diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. What Bransfield spent on himself and other priests was shocking, as the [Washington Post reported](#) in its review of the church's probe into Bransfield's ill-gotten booty.

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Subsequent to those findings, in July, [Pope Francis barred](#) him from performing Mass and even living in the diocese he had managed since 2005, after serving at the [National Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception](#) in Washington, D.C.

Francis ordered Bransfield to accept Brennan's accounting of the financial damage and "make personal amends." That led to [Brennan's letter](#), which the diocese disclosed yesterday and details what he expects Bransfield to do.

Aside from offering apologies to his sex-harassment victims, Bransfield must apologize "for the grievous harm he caused to the faithful of the Diocese and the reputation of the Catholic Church here in West Virginia" and "Diocesan employees who suffered from a culture of intimidation and retribution which the former bishop created."

Nor will Bransfield receive what retired bishops normally receive as a stipend. Instead, he'll get what a retired priest with 13 years service gets: \$736 a month. The diocese will provide Medicare supplemental healthcare coverage that it would provide for any retired priest, but the disgraced former bishop must pay for his own pharmacy benefit plan and his long-term health and disabilities policies.

As well, he must pay for or return the car the diocese gave him at retirement.

He will not be buried in the diocese, as is customary for bishops.



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## The Money

But next comes the money, which will likely be Bransfield's biggest problem.

"Our finance team determined that \$441,492.00 in Diocesan funds was allocated for the bishop's personal expenses, and apparently unrelated to his official responsibilities during the years of 2013-2018 which were not previously reported as taxable income to him," [Brennan wrote](#). "This amount reflects personal travel, vacations, clothing, alcohol and luxury goods."

Those were taxable benefits the diocese reported to the Internal Revenue Service, Brennan explained. Bransfield must repay the Diocese for that tax bill and the penalties that went with it.

"In addition, Bishop Bransfield will be required to pay an excise tax in the approximate amount of \$110,000.00 directly to the IRS," [Brennan wrote](#).

The diocese also expects him to repay another \$351,146 "attributable to the former bishop's luxurious lifestyle."

The total Bransfield must repay the diocese? \$792,638.

Adding the IRS penalty brings the damage to \$902,638.

"It is not my intention to impoverish the former bishop," [Brennan wrote](#), but the "amount reflects the spirit of Pope Francis' requirement that Bishop Bransfield make 'amends for some of the harm he caused.'"

As yet, Bransfield has not accepted the punishment.

## Post Report

In September, the [Washington Post published](#) a lengthy exposé on Bransfield. From 2005 through 2018, the newspaper reported, citing the probe, he spent more than \$2 million on high living that would be the envy of a successful corporate executive:

- \$997,000 — private jets
- \$662,000 — airfare, hotels
- \$139,281 — dining
- \$75,000 — rental cars
- \$68,000 — limousines
- \$62,303 — jewelry

Bransfield also spent \$4.6 million renovating his residence, the [Post reported](#), and [gave more than \\$350,000](#) in cash gifts to fellow clerics, including "young priests he is accused of mistreating and more than a dozen cardinals in the United States and at the Vatican."

## New Molestation Accusation

[The Post also disclosed](#) in October that cops were investigating Bransfield in connection with the molestation of a nine-year-old girl in 2012.

"Bransfield's accuser, now 16, told authorities in July that the incident occurred when they were alone in a room at the National Shrine" during a pilgrimage.

That report of abuse isn't the only scandal involving the shrine, the largest church building in the United States. Monsignor Walter R. Rossi, [who runs](#) the shrine, is a known homosexual predator, Catholic writer George Neumayer [has reported](#).



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*Photo: AP Images*

*R. Cort Kirkwood is a long-time contributor to The New American and a former newspaper editor.*



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