Accusations Against Priest Found to Be Not Credible

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has announced that an allegation of improp-
er sexual behavior with a minor against Father Richard F. Lewickiewicz, when he was a paro
cich vicar in Blessed Sacrament parish in Cypress Hills more than 30 years ago, has "no merit and no
credibility."

The bishop made the statement in a letter he wrote to parishioners of Our Lady of Angels parish in Bay Ridge, where Father Lewickiewicz has been a paro
cich vicar since 1986.

Maire Kevin B. Noone, the Episcopal Vicar for the Brooklyn West Vicariate, read the letter at the seven Masses at Our Lady of Angels last weekend, Oct. 30-31.

Stating that the parochial vicar will continue his pastoral ministry at the Bay Ridge parish, Bishop DiMarzio said: "I know that this has lifted a heavy burden from Father Lewickiewicz’s shoulders."

The bishop also said he was aware that Father Lewickiewicz “has been encouraged and touched” by the support of parishioners “during this difficult period in his life.” They responded with hearty applause when the news was announced at the Masses.

Bishop DiMarzio said it is his Diocesan Review Board to investiga
t the allegations of sexual misconduct. The panel is composed primarily of lay
persons from the fields of law enforcement, medicine, social services, and education.

“At the beginning of the investigation, the review board sought assistance in retaining the services of a respected private
 investigator with many years of experience examining sexual abuse cases as a member of the New York City
 Police Department,” the bishop wrote.

After the investigator conducted an extensive series of interviews over a
sizable period of time” with people associated with Blessed Sacrament parish when the alleged misconduct was said to have taken place and with the Lewickiewicz’s accusers, the bishop said the
t review board concluded that the accu-
ration had ‘no merit and no credibility.

The board “found no evidence that
Brooklyn Churches Will Be Lit for Christmas

BY MARIE ELENA GIOSSI

This Christmas will be merry and bright—quite literally—at 10 Brooklyn parishes that are benefitting from some small town generosity right here in the big city.

"Celebration of Light" is an annual endeavor, voluntarily undertaken by members of the Bay Ridge community, to illuminate the neighborhood and spread cheer to people of all faiths during the holiday season. Maimonides Medical Center, Borough Park, has once again signed on as chief sponsor of the program, which got an early start this year with a kickoff breakfast at St. Patrick School, Bay Ridge, in late October.

Pamela Brier, president of Maimonides, and Douglas Jablons, vice president of patient relations, presented checks to pastors and representatives of the participating parishes: Visitaton Monastery, St. Patrick, Our Lady of Angels and St. Anselm in Bay Ridge; St. Athanasius, St. Rosalia-Ragina Pacis and Our Lady of Gudalupe in Bensonhurst; St. Finbar in Bath Beach; Mary Queen of Heaven, Old Mill Basin; and St. Cecilia, Greenpoint. Funds will be used to cover the costs of their individual displays, which include life-size Nativity scenes, dozens of trees and tens of thousands of lights.

"It takes more than medical care to make people healthy," Brier said, before handing out the checks. "We look for opportunities to do good deeds" in the community, she said, and the hospital and its employees are happy to help.

St. Patrick, in addition to hosting the breakfast, also sponsored a "Kiss the Glass" campaign this year, and funds raised by the parishes will be used to purchase additional trees and lights.

"All of us, as friends, whether Christians or not, in the spirit of those we serve, are trying to instill good will in everyone," said Morrisey. "We want to give something that is so needed by all those we serve—that spiritual gift."

"It's capturing the whole flavor of the holidays for everyone—Christian, Jew, Muslim. It's a feel good thing."

Eleven years ago, Msgr. Joseph Parks, then-parish and now pastor emeritus of St. Patrick's, approached Morrisey and Golden on behalf of the Sisters of the Visitaton Monastery, who wanted to have a more noticeable spiritual presence in Bay Ridge, especially during the holidays.

"We wanted to do something to really bring out the spiritualism of the holiday season," said Morrisey, who worked with Golden to solicit contributions from local businesses. Executives at Chase Manhattan Bank donated a life-size Nativity to the monastery and contractors Long and DeLoa volunteered to set it up for the Sisters.

BIG-HEARTED BROOKLYNITES will make this a Christmas to remember for 10 parishes participating in the "Celebration of Light," an annual endeavor to decorate churches and spread holiday cheer. Program organizers, pastors and representatives from Maimonides Medical Center, Borough Park, chief sponsor, kicked off the program in late October.

"This will help us out," said Msgr. Forney O'Toole, pastor of St. Cecilia, of two new churches participating this year. Although he's still figuring out how to make the most of Maimonides' gift, he's confident it will bring joy to the people of the neighborhood and the neighborhoods around.

"Our goal is simply to provide something to the community to enjoy," he said.

This is the second year Our Lady of Gudalupe is participating. Long had this advice for the new pastor. Father Matteo Rizzo, "Get your sunglasses ready. The parish will unveil its display, "Light Up the Avenue with Christmas" on Dec. 11 at 6:30 p.m. Our Lady of Angels and Mary Queen of Heaven parishes will also light their trees that evening at 6 p.m.

"For years, our parish has done a family tree. We invite all the families of the parish to bring an ornament from home and put it on the tree. This gift will help us with the outdoor decoration of the family tree for the whole community," said Father Kull, parochial vicar at St. Anselm, also new to the program this year. St. Anselm's Tree Lighting will be after the 10 a.m. Family Mass on Dec. 12, and the accompanying Norma Mass will have its festivities at 6 p.m.

Accusations Not Credible

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St. Catharine of Alexandria School, Borough Park, installed its newly elected Student Council. Members are: back row, from left, Arbev Ramirez, treasurer; Roxanna Bermeo, secretary; Katherine Rodriguez, president; Lauren Glennon, historian; Lorriana Colon, vice president; Mardochee Augustin, historian; front row, class representatives, Rianna Bachan, Melanie Thakore, Damaris Soto and Starr Hernandez.

the priest had sexually abused a minor. The bishop said, adding that the board determined that his reputation "as a person of character faithful to his priestly vocation was well-deserved."

Bishop DiMarzio said he reviewed the board's report and the investigator's findings and accepted their conclusions and recommendation that Father Lewkewicz remain in ministry. The bishop also observed that from the time the accusation was made public a year ago, Father Lewkewicz "firmly and consistently" denied that he ever engaged in improper sexual behavior. The procedures followed in the investigations were in accordance with the "Charter for the Protection of Young People," issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002, the bishop said.

In his letter, Bishop DiMarzio addressed press reports that insist that the diocese should have never hired Father Lewkewicz immediately after the accusation was received. "This is not the case," he said. "An allegation is to be investigated before such an action is taken."

Only after an allegation is determined to be credible must a law enforcement or remove a clergyman from ministry.

Father Lewkewicz served in the Diocese of Rockaway from the time of his ordination in 1968 until 1979. He has served in Rockaway Park from 1979 to 1987 at Good Shepherd parish, Maspeth. He served as parochial vicar at St. Camillus Parish in Rockaway Park from 1979 to 1987 at Good Shepherd parish, Maspeth. He served as parochial vicar at St. Camillus Parish in Rockaway Park from 1979 to 1987.