

THE BUFFALO NEWS

DIOCESE REASSIGNS PRIEST FACING PUBLIC LEWDNESS CHARGE

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Officials from the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo Friday reassigned a priest from a Lewiston church who was arrested Tuesday after being accused of exposing himself to two teen-age girls on Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo.

The Rev. Benedict P. Barszcz, 35, an assistant pastor at St. Peter's Catholic Church, faces a misdemeanor charge of public lewdness.

He was accused of masturbating in front of the two girls, ages 14 and 15, while sitting in a car on Jefferson Avenue at about 5:20 p.m., according to police reports.

Monsignor David M. Lee, communications director for the diocese, said Father Barszcz's appointment to the Lewiston parish was scheduled to end July 31.

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"In light of what happened this week, we have made a decision that his appointment is ending today," Monsignor Lee said Friday morning. "He is no longer allowed to celebrate Mass or the other sacraments publicly."

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Father Barszcz, a Pallottine priest who was named parochial vicar of the Lewiston church in October, will leave the parish and return to the Pallottine Center on Niagara Falls Boulevard.

Friday's action by the diocese is in keeping with its guidelines whenever allegations are brought against a priest "to do what is best for the people and what is best for the priest," Monsignor Lee said.

Father Barszcz met with Monsignor Robert J. Cunningham, the diocesan chancellor, Thursday, after reporters had contacted the diocese about the arrest.

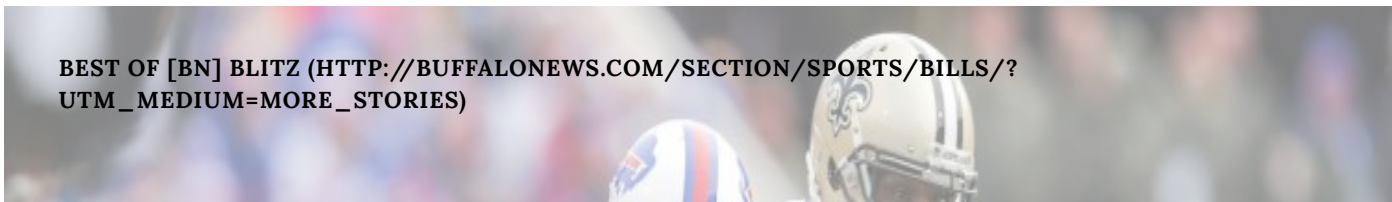
Monsignor Lee would not discuss anything that was said at that meeting.

The man who exposed himself Tuesday drove away, and the two girls and their families flagged down two Amherst detectives who were in the area. The detectives, John Griffin and Jeffrey Knople, later pulled Father Barszcz over on Best Street.

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