



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 6, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we approach the season of Thanksgiving, my prayer is that the strength of the Holy Spirit will renew and deepen our Faith in Jesus Christ. Particularly, as together we face the difficult challenges that the Coronavirus has brought, I call upon the intercession of Our Blessed Mother for the safety and health of you and your family.

It may be recalled that in October of 2018, I shared with you that the then-Attorney General of Florida, Pam Bondi, ordered an investigation of how the seven Dioceses in Florida have handled allegations of misconduct involving minors by clergy. With the full cooperation of the Diocese of Venice, the investigation was thoroughly conducted through the Office of the Statewide Prosecutor, who requested specific clergy files. As a result, a list of priests who had been accused of a substantiated allegation of a sexual offense against minors has been issued by the Statewide Prosecutor. This listing of priests accused of misconduct in Florida is the final action to be taken and the State investigation has been concluded.

Included on the State's list are nine priests who were incardinated in the Diocese of Venice against whom substantiated allegations have been identified in the investigation. None of the priests listed presently have faculties (allowed to minister) in the Diocese. Some have died, some have been laicized or dismissed from clerical state, and others have had their priestly faculties permanently removed. When the investigation was announced in 2018, it was not precipitated by any new allegation of abuse. The investigation involved historic cases.

As your Bishop, I wish to express compassion and my continual prayer for all victims of child sexual abuse and that each receive God's healing and peace. The harm done is grave. On behalf of the Church, I ask forgiveness of those who have been harmed by Clergy or others involved with the Church. The Diocese remains committed to the Policy for the Protection of Children and I am pleased that the Statewide Prosecutor's report recognizes that the Diocese has followed its policies.

The Statewide Prosecutor's Report is a sad reminder of the harm done in the past to minors by those who had been ordained to serve the Church and care for the Faithful. Be reassured that the investigation did not uncover previously unknown cases in the Diocese of Venice. The commitment the Diocese made in accord with the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* has proven effective and helpful in protecting our children, young people and vulnerable adults.

This moment also allows for me to once again encourage all who have been abused to report it to Department of Children and Families and if it involves clergy of the Diocese of Venice, to contact also the Diocesan Victim's Assistance Coordinator. The Diocese takes every report of abuse seriously and responds promptly.

Humbly, I invite all to continue to pray for the victims of child sexual abuse. Pray also for the Church's efforts to protect our children and foster a safe environment for all.

May Almighty God bless you and your family, through Christ our Lord.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank J. Dewane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Venice in Florida

FJD/nml