



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 17, 2018

Dear Brother and Sisters, Faithful of the Diocese of Venice,

Bishops and Priests are entrusted with the spiritual care and protection of their flock, particularly of minors and vulnerable adults. As Pastors, they act in the name of Christ and His Church, and so must always heed the Good Shepherd's warning: *"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea"* (Mark 9:42).

As your Bishop, I understand the grave moral responsibility with which I have been entrusted and that it is my duty to protect the faithful from harm. Recent revelations of profound evil cause me deep distress. The sexual abuse inflicted on so many sons and daughters of the Church is sinful and criminal. Some Church Hierarchy failed to do as they were obligated to do. While we are all sinners, the heinous history of abuse and coverup, such as that detailed by the Grand Jury in Pennsylvania, is utterly appalling and deeply disturbing.

The new disclosures of abuse leave me sorrowful. It is painful that Church Officials contributed to a culture that too easily excused predatory behavior. No words can adequately express my contrition for the horrible sins committed. I wish to offer victims and their families my sincere apology for what was done to them by ministers of the Church. It is my commitment to do personal penance in reparation for these grave sins and to encourage the clergy and faithful of the Diocese to join with me in this penance.

Recent revelations are indeed troubling, yet I feel indebted to the victims who courageously shed the light of truth on the horrific misdeeds and the indifference to the outcry of those abused. It is important to express abiding esteem to those who survived the sinful and criminal conduct of Priests and Bishops. Violating the sacred trust of their ministry, clergy took advantage of the innocent and the vulnerable who sought out and had a right to spiritual care. It is the time for these failures to be admitted and remedied.

On the diocesan website (www.dioceseofvenice.org) there is posted a statement informing the public about those priests named in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report who have had some ties to the Diocese of Venice. It is hoped this transparency will demonstrate my conviction that Church leadership must be vigilant in protecting minors and prevent the same failures from being repeated. In this matter, there is no room for institutional interests. As your Shepherd, it is my pledge to recommit our Diocese to the vigorous efforts to eradicate sexual abuse and further foster a culture of safety. Bishops must demonstrate a willingness to welcome victims of sexual abuse with compassion, hear their allegations with openness and deal effectively with those — regardless of rank or position — who committed abuse of any kind.

My prayer is that recent revelations will shed the light of truth on these troubling matters and show Church leaders the steps that need to be taken to regain the trust of the faithful.

Mary Mother of the Church, reform the hearts of those who lead your Church. Make us more attentive to the cries of those who suffer abuse and help us show true contrition for our failures. Bring the comfort of your maternal care to all who have been impacted by sexual abuse.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

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



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Communications Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 16, 2018

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Director of Communications

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Statement from the Diocese of Venice

The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report released on August 14, 2018 indicates six priests with ties to the Diocese of Venice.

The said report mentions Rev. Robert Brague, a deceased priest from the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, who served in the Diocese of Venice as Parochial Vicar of St. Ann's Parish in Naples from 1990 -1991, then at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Palmetto from 1991 to 1997. Father Brague, who remained a Diocese of Scranton priest throughout his stay here, passed away on December 18, 1997. The Diocese is not aware, nor was it ever informed, of any abuse allegations in the Diocese of Venice pertaining to Father Brague. This information has been verified from Diocesan archives. The then Bishop of the Diocese, Most Rev. John J. Nevins, Bishop from 1984-2007, and passed away in 2014.

Regarding the second priest, it can be confirmed that Rev. Thomas M. O'Donnell, has never had faculties in the Diocese of Venice, and priestly faculties were neither requested, nor granted. He is a priest from the Diocese of Pittsburgh, who resides at St. John XXIII HUD project (Housing and Urban Development) in Fort Myers. Residency requirements are determined by HUD and its fair housing rules. Eligibility and background screenings are required by HUD.

Father Sean Kerins, also mentioned in the report as a priest from the Diocese of Erie, has no association with the Diocese of Venice. It should be noted that the Diocese of Venice was informed by the Diocese of Erie in a letter dated February 2018, that one of their priests, Father Kerins, had been "removed from ministry" and would be residing with family in Naples.

Father Robert E. Spangenberg, C.S.Sp. was granted faculties in the Diocese of Venice from October 1989 through September 1990. He returned to Sarasota in July 2002 and stayed until February 2003; there is no record of faculties being granted for that period.

Regarding Fathers Raymond R. Rhoden and Timothy Sperber, there are no records in Diocesan files and they are unknown to the Diocese of Venice.

If a priest is retired, or moves to the area of the Diocese and does not request to exercise their priestly ministry, the Diocese is not always informed and has no way of confirming or knowing an individual is within its boundaries.



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The Diocese of Venice and its entities, take very seriously the safety of all young people and vulnerable adults. To this end, the Diocese works to prevent any instances of abuse, particularly against minors and vulnerable adults with a zero-tolerance policy.

Any person who believes abuse has occurred should immediately contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The sexual abuse of children and young people by anyone, but particularly by clergy and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, is unacceptable. The ways in which many of these crimes and sins were addressed, have caused enormous pain, anger and confusion. The Diocese asks all to pray for victims of this scourge and their families, to receive healing and renewed hope. The perpetrators of these inhumane crimes are to be held responsible for their actions.

The Diocese of Venice is aware of its responsibilities and role in reporting any accusation of sexual abuse against minors and vulnerable adults, and strives to be alert for any such offenses.