



# *St. Mary—Our Lady of the Isle*

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Dear Friends in Christ,

In recent weeks, we have all been facing, once again, a deeply DISTURBING issue in our Church: The painful issue of clergy sexual abuse. Words cannot express how saddened, how disillusioned, how demoralized, and how angry I feel about this.

As Pope Francis acknowledged in his recent statement on clergy sexual abuse, the experience of sexual abuse traumatizes its victims, and leaves them dealing with the resulting wounds for the rest of their lives. This horrific behavior is particularly reprehensible when committed by priests who have been called to be trustworthy servants of God.

Last week, Bishop da Cunha wrote to all the priests of the Fall River Diocese about the reemergence of the clergy sexual abuse scandal. He, too, expressed how saddened and disturbed he is by it. He also pledged his support to the priests of the diocese to help us through this difficult time, a gesture which I very much appreciated.

Bishop da Cunha also acknowledged some recent hopeful developments. The President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has announced a series of steps designed to implement stronger protections against predators in the church, and anyone who would conceal them. These protections would include holding bishops to the highest standards of transparency and accountability. Bishop da Cunha pledged that, as our Bishop, he will do all that he can to ensure that this happens.

He also noted that, last spring, our Fall River Diocese established a separate, stand-alone Office of Safe Environment to oversee our child protection protocols and programs. The work of this office has strengthened Diocesan efforts in the areas of abuse prevention and creating safe environments, especially for children. Bishop da Cunha also reiterated his own commitment to doing everything he can to ensure that a culture of safe environment permeates all ministries and programs offered by the Fall River Diocese, especially those which serve our children and young people.

In conclusion, please pray for the eradication of all forms of sexual abuse. Let us pray also for all who have been victims of sexual abuse, that they may find the comfort, peace, and healing they need. And finally, please pray for all priests, that the Lord will bless us with the necessary inspiration and strength to continue serving His people with love and joy in the Catholic Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Rev. John P. Kelleher*