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Diocesan Response to the Sexual Abuse Crisis

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Diocesan Response to the Sexual Abuse Crisis



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Diocese of Fall River

Office of the Bishop

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

January 7, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we begin this New Year, I pray that God will bless us all with His grace and bring peace to those in our community who have suffered greatly during the pandemic and the many other challenges we have all faced in 2020.

The scourge of clergy sexual abuse has deeply wounded so many people in our Church. It has touched every diocese worldwide and continues to affect us all – laity and clergy – in significant ways. Today, it is with a contrite heart and commitment to the healing process that I have published a list of clergy, diocesan and religious related to the Diocese of Fall River who have been credibly or publicly accused of committing sexual abuse of a minor.

The review of Diocesan records, some going back 70 years, was incredibly arduous and time consuming. While this review has taken longer than first anticipated, it was crucial that we took the time needed to do it right.

To all survivors of child sexual abuse, I am deeply sorry. We as a Church failed when you were most vulnerable. I firmly resolve to do all we can to help you heal, make certain we are accountable, and protect our children so that no other child suffers as you have.

It is part of our sacred mission to remain vigilant in efforts to protect children and vulnerable adults in our parishes, schools, programs and ministries. As we conducted this review of Diocesan records, our Diocese also revamped our Safe Environment program to strengthen our child protection efforts, as well as our protocols for handling allegations and responding to those impacted by abuse.

We require all personnel to submit to a background check, agree to a code of conduct, and complete a Safe Environment Training Program. Our Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful has detailed instructions for Diocesan personnel who receive allegations of abuse. In addition, many Diocesan personnel are mandated reporters. We have a dedicated Victim Assistance Coordinator, a licensed social worker who is the first point of contact when an allegation is received and works closely with me to ensure that we are adequately addressing the rights and needs of any victims.

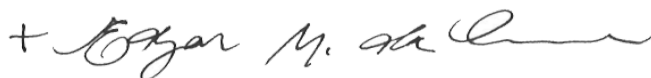
If you, or anyone you know, have suffered abuse by a priest or someone affiliated with the Diocese of Fall River, I urge you to call our Victim Assistance Coordinator at 508-985-6508 or visit our [website](#). You have my assurance that your voice will be heard.

It is my prayerful and deepest hope that the publication of this list will help in the ongoing healing and care of survivors of clergy sexual abuse. They are of paramount concern to me and remain always in my prayers.

To every one of you who has suffered, I know that finding the ability to trust again is a slow and difficult journey. Together, may we find hope in Jesus Christ, may the Blessed Virgin Mary be a

mother to us all, and may God grant us peace.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Bishop of Fall River

- [View/Download the Bishop's Letter in Portuguese](#)
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Priests Accused of Sexual Abuse of a Minor

Introduction

In 2019, in a public letter, Bishop da Cunha announced the intention of the Diocese of Fall River to publish a list of clergy against whom credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been made.

The list published here contains the names of clergy who have been incardinated or ministered in the Diocese of Fall River and have been credibly or publicly accused of sexual abuse of a minor. Most of the allegations pertain to abuse alleged to have taken place many decades ago; approximately half of those on this list are deceased.

It is for the survivors of clergy sexual abuse that we publish this list. We know there has been grave damage done and that this is long overdue. It is the Diocese's hope that publishing this list will help bring healing to the survivors and their families who have been so grievously harmed. The publication of this list is also an expression of our sincere commitment to transparency and accountability.

Compiling the List

The Diocese underwent a lengthy process to compile and maintain this list. The first steps involved the collection of 70 plus years of data. This was not clear cut given that files were kept in various locations, were neither digitized nor organized, and included everything from academic records, to vacation requests, to other forms of correspondence. Early on, it was quite clear that, historically, the record-keeping was inadequate and incomplete and that we would not be able to complete our review as quickly as we had hoped. While this review, conducted with the assistance of experts in the field, took longer than first thought, it was essential that we took the time needed to do it right.

Expert Assistance

An initial evaluation of the files was performed by former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Assistant Director William Gavin of The Gavin Group. After an initial review of the files, the Diocese engaged Kinsale Management Consulting, under the leadership of Kathleen McChesney, Ph.D., former Executive Assistant Director for the FBI and former head of the Office of Child Protection of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Among other things, Kinsale provides expertise on prevention and response to allegations of abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and in this case conducted a detailed file review to identify allegations against individual priests.

The Diocese then engaged the law firm Ropes & Gray LLP to assist it in creating and publishing this list. Ropes & Gray conducted a further investigation and review of Diocesan records and legal files and, at the conclusion of its review, provided a summary of its findings to a core advisory group from the Diocese.

The Core Advisory Group consisted of:

- Fr. Richard Wilson, Vicar General
- Fr. John Murray, Moderator of the Curia
- Mr. Kevin Kiley, Chancellor
- Mrs. Lorraine Levy, Director of Professional Standards and Oversight
- Mr. Michael Carroll, General Counsel and Chief Legal Officer

After careful review, the Core Advisory Group presented its findings to The Edward Davis Company to conduct a third-party review (see [The Edward Davis Company Review](#)). Led by former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis, The Edward Davis Company is comprised of a team of former law enforcement officials with deep knowledge of investigations and experience in protecting victims of crime. The Edward Davis Company was given access to clergy files and other relevant information, in order to advise Bishop da Cunha on whether the process (described above) was thorough, fair, and reasonable, to review the placement and category for each name considered for publication, and to present recommendations to Bishop da Cunha. After review and consideration by Bishop da Cunha, the published list reflects those recommendations.

Though the Diocese has taken great care to prepare this list, we understand that this information may still be imperfect. We appreciated the gravity of this effort and did all we could to make the best judgments based on the information available. We are committed to maintaining this list and updating it if and when new information becomes available.

Criteria and Standard of Proof

The Diocese prepared a standard of review to guide its decisions in preparing this list. It adopted the definitions of “minor” and “sexual abuse of a child” from the [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#).

While the Diocese already had a review board in place, in 2020, it updated its policies and reconstituted the review board as the Ministerial Review Board (MRB). The purpose of the MRB is to review allegations made against clergy and make recommendations to the Bishop. The MRB includes a former Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Appeals Court; a retired Senior Executive of the FBI; a Lieutenant Colonel Judge Advocate (Retired) with the United States Marine Corps with experience in sexual abuse matters; a psychologist specializing in child, adolescent and adult trauma and treatment of youth with sexual behavior problems; a licensed social worker; a registered nurse; and others. A complete list of MRB members and their titles can be found [here](#).

When making determinations about the evidence presented to the MRB, the [Ministerial Review Board Policy](#) provides:

6.5 The MRB will be required to assess the credibility of the allegations, specifically whether the allegation has a “semblance of truth” under canon law, using a standard of proof approximating probable cause, and whether the allegations conform to the definition of sexual abuse of a minor as outlined in the policy developed and adopted by the Diocese of Fall River.

The Core Advisory Group adopted this same standard of proof in evaluating the credibility of the allegations made against a priest. It found allegations credible when they had “a ‘semblance of truth’ under canon law, using a standard of proof approximating probable cause[.]”

Frequently Asked Questions

The Diocese has published a “[Frequently Asked Questions](#)” document that addresses many of the topics raised, including:

- The commitments of the Diocese pertaining to eradicating and addressing clergy sexual abuse;
- Steps the Diocese takes when it receives an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult;
- Review of Diocesan policies and procedures;
- Prevention of child sexual abuse in Diocesan parishes, schools, and ministries;
- Understanding the Ministerial Review Board and how it functions; and
- Removal of credibly accused priests.

Categories

The list includes the following three main categories. To access each category, please click the category name or links below.

[Credibly Accused:](#)

Includes priests, seminarians, and other religious against whom an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor was made that meets the semblance of truth standard defined above and who were incardinated in the Diocese of Fall River and/or assigned to public ministry in the Diocese of Fall River. This category is divided into three subcategories: (A) Incardinated in the Diocese of Fall River; (B) Other Diocese; and (C) Religious Order. For those in sub-categories B and C, respectively, the priest was incardinated in another diocese or was a member of a religious order but exercised public ministry in the Diocese of Fall River. [CLICK TO VIEW LIST OF CREDIBLY ACCUSED](#)

[Publicly Accused:](#)

Includes priests, seminarians, or other religious who were either incardinated in the Diocese of Fall River or who were assigned to public ministry in the Diocese of Fall River, and have been publicly named in media reports, third party lists prepared by advocacy groups and/or other dioceses and religious orders, as having allegations against them involving sexual abuse of a minor. The individuals included are clergy or other religious against whom a publicized accusation was made, but for whom the Diocese lacks sufficient information at this time to make its own determination whether the accusation was credible. In some cases, a religious order or other diocese may have determined that the priest was credibly accused after investigation or upon admission of the priest.

It is important to note that just because a name appears on the publicly accused list, that does not necessarily mean that the individual was accused of abusing a child in the Diocese of Fall River. For example, a priest may have been publicly accused of abuse in another diocese or may appear on a credibly accused list for a religious order for allegations unrelated to the Diocese of Fall River. If we were able to confirm that the priest also worked in the Diocese of Fall River at some point in his career, we have included the priest on the publicly accused list even if the Diocese did not itself receive an allegation regarding that priest. [CLICK TO VIEW LIST OF PUBLICLY ACCUSED](#)

[Cases in Process:](#)

Includes living priests of the Diocese of Fall River who have been publicly accused of sexually abusing a minor, but the canonical and/or civil proceedings involving these priests have not yet been resolved. There has not been a determination either under canon (Church) or civil law regarding whether the allegations against clergy listed in this category are credible. Consistent with the principles of the American justice system and Church law, these individuals are afforded a presumption of innocence. The priests in this section are prohibited from engaging in public ministry while their cases are in process. [CLICK TO VIEW LIST OF CASES IN PROCESS](#)

Note: This list is provided based on information available at the time it is published. If the need arises to add names to this list based on the criteria explained above, the Diocese will do so.

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 - [Publicly Accused](#)
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- [Glossary of Terms and FAQs](#)
- [The Edward Davis Company Review](#)
- [Training and Education](#)
- [Report an Incident of Abuse](#)
- [Clergy List News Release](#)



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