



## DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA

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*Communications Department*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Benedict Nguyen

*Director of Communications*

941-486-4714

[nguyen@dioceseofvenice.org](mailto:nguyen@dioceseofvenice.org)

### **Statement Regarding Call to Action Solicitation Letter**

The Diocese of Venice is greatly saddened to learn of the repeated attempt to smear publically the reputation and good name of Bishop Frank J. Dewane and the Diocese of Venice, while also misleading the faithful, by “Call to Action,” a group that has been deemed “totally incompatible with the Catholic faith” by the Vatican and countless Catholic faithful. A petition by their leader in Southwest Florida appealing to Pope Francis simply reiterates the sweeping, unfounded, general accusations from several months ago by a few anonymous priests.

The validity of the recent Call to Action online “petition” and its “signatures” is dubious. The promotion of such a petition to the local press is an obvious effort by Call to Action to solicit more “signatures” and is a blatant publicity effort to increase their database and their coffers, with a “donation” link adjacent to the “petition.” One also has to wonder how many of the “signatures” are from people who live within the Diocese of Venice and how many are generated from people outside the area and clearly have a personal grudge with the Catholic Church and likely have never met or even heard of Bishop Dewane. Ironically, even if all of these “signatures” were indeed from the faithful of the Diocese of Venice, this would represent less than one-half of one percent (< 0.50%) of the total Catholic population of the Diocese. Does this mean that Bishop Dewane has the corresponding approval rating? The reality of being a Bishop is that it is not a popularity contest, this is why Bishop Dewane and the Diocese of Venice continuously seek the input of the faithful in order to serve better their needs.

Many can attest to Bishop Dewane being out and about with the people of the Diocese in the expression of his pastoral concern and love for the faithful, and to his easy availability and continual interest in listening to any valid concerns of both priests and laity. When the anonymous letter from a few priests was leaked, he immediately met with the priests of the Diocese to listen to their concerns in open and frank dialogue. Clearly, the majority of priests were not in agreement with the anonymous letter and strongly disagreed with its content. The Bishop regularly consults with the laity and priests regarding matters of pastoral planning for needs of the faithful and for the future of the Diocese.

General accusations of financial malfeasance as well as fear and intimidation were soundly answered by the lay Chair of the Diocesan Finance Council on behalf of the lay members of the Council, asserting financial transparency, citing specific examples such as yearly audits, and stating clearly that “neither in



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matters of finances nor in our personal experience have we found the Bishop to be anything other than professional and respectful.”

The general accusation of injustice, particularly regarding personnel issues, is also simply untrue. In these matters, Bishop Dewane gives much deference to pastors, principals, and heads of other entities. However, in extraordinary situations, Church law requires the Bishop to take appropriate action. In these situations, Bishop Dewane has always taken seriously the concern and well-being of all involved.

Regarding the accusation of “living in luxury”: Bishop Dewane lives in a one-story house that was formerly used as a convent, located behind a local Catholic high school, and built in 1963 – hardly the definition of luxury. He regularly opens his house to host gatherings for priests, religious, and faithful of the Diocese.

The Call to Action letter speaks of a call for justice, but justice is not constituted by the malicious accusations of anonymous individuals and, in fact, calls for knowing one’s accusers.

Pope Francis clearly teaches that “Diocesan life means a relationship with the Bishop, which must be realized and must grow continuously.” Call to Action’s recent letter ignores this call to unity and attempts to advance its own agenda of negativity and division. Call to Action, in its agenda to continually smear the reputation of Bishop Dewane and the Diocese of Venice, draws attention away from the spiritual leadership and pastoral work of the Bishop in providing for the poor, promoting the education of the youth, organizing care and development for the priests and religious of the Diocese, and teaching the truths of the Faith to all.

It is our prayer that Call to Action will honor the call of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, to unity with the Diocesan Bishop rather than to advance its own agenda of division and standing against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather than division and negativity, let us move forward in prayer towards peace and unity. It is precisely in prayer where the Spirit is present and where all can move forward together in Our Lord.