

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
530 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

July 8, 2016

Dear Senators Whitehouse and Reed,

As Rhode Island clergy and religious leaders, we have a responsibility to pass the riches of our faith traditions on to future generations. Deeply embedded in our faith traditions is the moral imperative to care for our natural world. The ocean inspires a great sense of mystery, awe, and promise. With modern subaquatic cameras, we are finally getting an inkling of what wonders lie underwater, and what these wonders reveal to us about the Divine. Up until very recently, most of us did not know that only 100 miles off the New England coastline, under the Atlantic Ocean, we have canyons as deep as the Grand Canyon and mounts nearly as high as the Rockies, which are highly biodiverse areas in the Atlantic.

As a matter of faithful stewardship of God's gifts, we believe it is a moral imperative to shelter this special place from harm. The coral canyons and seamounts have rare cold-water corals more than a thousand years old. They are home to hundreds of species. Scientists are continuing to identify new species in this area, which are proving to be some of the most exotic and wondrous creatures on Earth. In some of our faith traditions we might liken this place to an underwater modern "Noah's ark" which will help a diversity of species be more resilient to climate impacts.

We also appreciate these undersea treasures are integral to the historical heritage of tribes native to this region. Long before the advent of industrial activity in these waters, these tribes exercised wise stewardship of the gifts of the ocean. We owe it to future generations to maintain these gifts with the same level of care these tribes have demonstrated over many centuries.

By showing reverence and care for the natural world, we honor the Divine. By designating these special areas as national monuments, we improve the chances our communities can get to know, love, and be good stewards of these beautiful, unique, and biodiverse areas. These special places deserve permanent protection so they can thrive for generations to come.

We ask that you use your position of influence to ensure protection for New England's Coral Canyons and Seamounts as the first marine monument in the Atlantic Ocean.

With hope,

The Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely, DD SOSC
Bishop, The Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island
Providence, RI

Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island
West Warwick, RI

Rev. Barbara Libby
Interim Conference Minister, Rhode Island Conference of the United Church of Christ
Pawtucket, RI

Rev. Dr. Donald Anderson
Executive Minister, Rhode Island State Council of Churches
North Kingstown, RI

Ms. Barbara Scott
President, Rhode Island State Council of Churches
Bristol, RI

Rev. Dr. Anita Schell
Rector, Emanuel Church
President, Interfaith Power & Light of Rhode Island
Warwick, RI

Dr. Ray Frackelton
Retired Scientist; Rhode Island Interfaith Power and Light Board Member
Rumford, RI

The Rev. Dr. Peter Michaelson
Episcopal Priest, The Mission to Seafarers - Narragansett Bay
Warwick, RI

The Ven. Janice L. Grinnell, Archdeacon
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Reverend Janet M. Cooper Nelson
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Rev. Cleo Graham
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Rev. Dr. Joyce B. Deurr
Pastor, Tabernacle Baptist Church
Hope, RI

Rev. Nikita McCalister
Associate Minister, Calvary Baptist Church
West Warwick, RI

Mrs. Beverly Walton
Green Team Leader, Beneficent Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Chepachet, RI

Rev. Dr. Hyuk Seonwoo
Pastor, Zion Korean United Methodist Church
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The Rev. Sandra D'Amico
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