



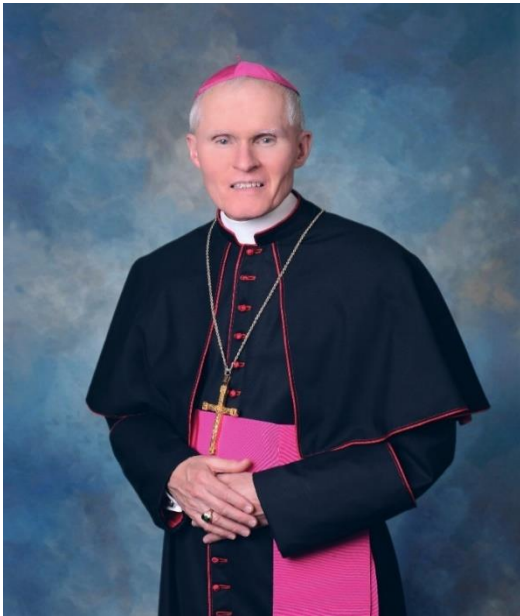
Safe Environment

Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

Fall 2022

Bishop Institutes Yearly On-Site Audits

Bishop Mark Brennan notified all parishes and schools via letter dated 13 October 2022 that he has successfully petitioned the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to conduct yearly on-site Safe Environment audits in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. This will be in addition to the yearly data collection audits in which the diocese participates. Historically, the diocese participates in a yearly data collection audit and is on-site audited every three years. Under the new protocol, the diocese will participate in a yearly data collection audit as well as a yearly on-site audit. Here is the full text of Bishop Brennan's letter to parishes and schools:



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am writing to inform you of a significant development in the Safe Environment audit process. Starting in 2023, I have elected yearly on-site United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) audits for our parishes and schools. Historically, our diocese participates in data collection audits every year and on-site audits every three years. As you are aware, the on-site audit entails many components at the Chancery level as well as auditors from Stonebridge Business Partners, the USCCB's contracted auditing agency, randomly visiting our parishes and schools to verify Safe Environment compliance and best practices. Starting in 2023, we will participate in the yearly data collection audit, and we will begin participating in yearly on-site USCCB/Stonebridge audits.

The yearly on-site USCCB audits by Stonebridge will be in addition to the on-site audits conducted by our fingerprinting service provider, Corporate Security Investigations (CSI). We have engaged CSI's services on a three-year rotating basis for our schools and parishes for fingerprinting as well as spot-checking/auditing for Safe Environment compliance while they are on site. These professional audits, by the USCCB/Stonebridge and CSI, combined with visits from Chancery staff will round out a full on-site protocol for ensuring that our parishes and schools are complying with the Safe Environment process and best practices.

I firmly believe on-site visits at the local level are integral to ensuring that our parishes and schools have a clear understanding of and commitment to the requirements as set forth in the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The 2022 on-site USCCB/Stonebridge audit revealed that a more robust look at the local level is necessary to maintain and assure overall compliance with the Charter. We will do this for the good of our children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults.

As we continue to restore trust and build a culture of safety in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, I would like to call to mind the concrete steps we already have taken toward these efforts. They include: release of the list of credibly accused clergy; implementation of a third-party reporting system (Navex

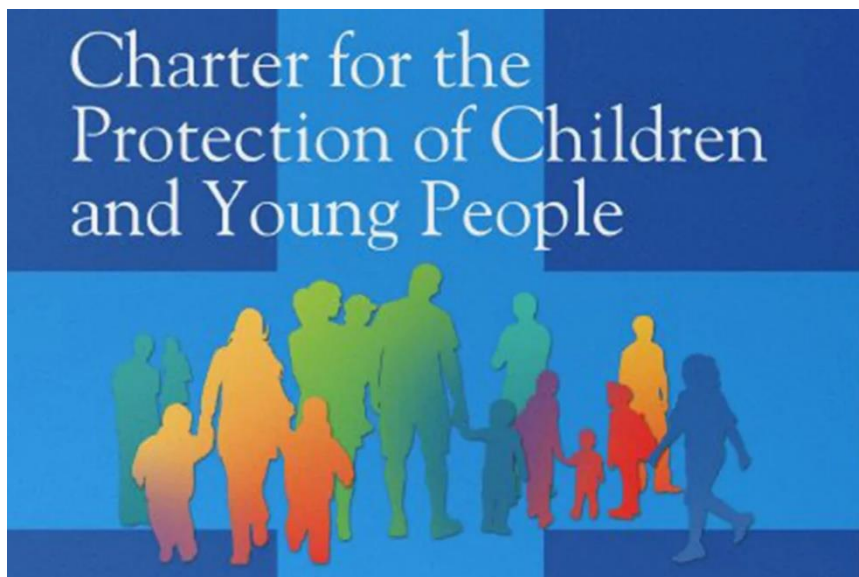
Global's EthicsPoint); promotion of reportbishopabuse.org for reporting misconduct and concerns pertaining to bishops; engagement of CSI for fingerprinting clergy and school personnel and on-site audits; and release of the diocese's yearly financial audit/report. The transition to yearly on-site audits by the USCCB/Stonebridge is a natural progression of our efforts to ensure we are on solid and consistent ground relative to Safe Environment compliance throughout the Diocese. You may expect more information from the Office of Safe Environment regarding the upcoming on-site USCCB/Stonebridge yearly audit process as time progresses. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to Sharon Goudy in the Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504 or sgoudy@dwc.org with any questions or concerns.

I am confident in your cooperation and willingness to continue our efforts to protect children and vulnerable adults and strengthen and grow a culture of safety.

Sincerely in Christ,
+Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston

Transition to VIRTUS Platform for Tracking Safe Environment Compliance Has Been Successful

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston successfully transitioned to the VIRTUS platform for tracking and documenting Safe Environment compliance in July. The diocese no longer uses the ParishSoft Safe Environment Program Manager to document completion of awareness training, background checks, and document acknowledgements for employees and volunteers who work directly or indirectly with children. The diocese will continue to use the ParishSoft system for purposes of census, offering, attendance, and sacraments, etc. However, the tracking and documentation for Safe Environment has fully transitioned to the VIRTUS platform. So far, feedback from local level Safe Environment coordinators at parishes and schools has been overwhelmingly positive. Local level coordinators find the new system easier to use and the automated process has lessened their workloads. Just a friendly reminder that all employees and volunteers who work directly or indirectly with children are required to be background checked every three years. Modernizing our platforms and processes is part of our commitment to establishing and growing a culture of safety in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.



Why Is There an Office of Safe Environment?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) requires that all Dioceses/Eparchies have in place a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. The ***“Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People”*** was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 as a response to sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons, particularly from the time period of 1950 to 2002. The USCCB established an **Office of Child and Youth Protection** to oversee the application of the Charter's principles and to create the means for accountability for ensuring implementation of standards.

Reporting

The Diocese encourages reporting to civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed.



To Report to Civil Authorities:

Contact your local law enforcement; numbers will vary based on your location. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

To confidentially report any incidence of suspected child abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, contact the West Virginia Bureau for Children and Families' Child Protective Services by calling the Child Abuse Hotline at 800-352-6513.

To Report Abuse by a Bishop of the Catholic Church:

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston encourages reporting to civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. We also encourage utilizing www.reportbishopabuse.org to report. If you have reason to believe that a bishop has engaged in sexual misconduct or has interfered with an investigation into sexual misconduct, please contact civil authorities in the applicable jurisdiction and visit www.reportbishopabuse.org.

To the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston:

The Diocese encourages reporting to the appropriate civil authorities first and foremost as well as to the appropriate church authorities. To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by clergy, religious or lay personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact one of the Bishop's designees at 1-888-434-6237: Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Tim Bishop, ext. 353; Very Rev. Dennis R. Schuelkens Jr., V.E., ext. 270; or please call the Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504. You may also visit www.dwc.org, under "Accountability," and utilize any of the mechanisms listed for reporting. To report to the Diocese's **Victim Assistance Coordinator** call Dr. Patricia Bailey: 304-242-6988.

The Three Components of Compliance

The Safe Environment Program by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston consists of the following three components:

- ✓ Background Check
- ✓ Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children and acknowledgement of documents
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components are mandated by the diocese for persons seeking employment or seeking to volunteer directly or indirectly with children. A person is considered in compliance with the Diocese's Safe Environment Policy upon successful completion of all three components. Every year, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston - as well as all other dioceses in the United States - is audited by the USCCB for compliance with its "*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*." The Diocese also convenes a lay-led Review Board that meets regularly to review all Safe Environment matters and ensure adherence to the Safe Environment process, including reporting to civil authorities.





Teaching Safety

A Student Awareness Program has been implemented since the fall of 2005 to give children information (appropriate for their age levels) and skills to help recognize acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and how to effectively deal with those behaviors. This is a VIRTUS program called **"Teaching Safety."** The program is taught in Catholic schools and as part of Parish Schools of Religion. This program offers lesson plans for children in grades Kindergarten through 12.

The "Teaching Safety" lesson cycle for this year is:

School Year **2022-23** ... **Lesson FOUR** and **Lesson FIVE** ... Lesson Four should have been taught by the end of October. Lesson Five should be taught by the end of the school year. Many of our schools have already taught both lessons together. If your parish school of religion or your Catholic school has not taught the lessons yet, please proceed with completion and documentation. All parents/guardians are welcome to view the lessons being taught in advance. And all parent/guardians who opt out of the lessons for their children are welcome to take copies of the lessons and teach them at home. Please contact your parish or school if you would like to see the lessons in advance of being taught or if you would like to opt out your child and teach the lessons at home yourself.

What Do I Say If an Adult Tells Me They Were Abused Years Ago?

By Michael J. Bland, Psy.D., D. Min., L.C.P.C.

Sexual abuse of young people is a societal reality. Some have referred to sexual abuse as a "silent reality." The sexual abuse crisis which erupted many years ago within the Catholic Church helped break the silence. However, the truth is that those revelations reflect only a small part of the broader societal problem of sexual abuse and does not begin to address the reality of child neglect.



According to Protecting God's Children® for Adults training material, one in four girls and one in six boys have experienced some form of sexual abuse before age 18. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated that more than 80 percent of incidents within society are never reported to authorities because of the nature of these crimes, the shame and secrecy involved, and the devastating impact upon the victim.

Those who know someone who has been victimized have seen the emotional, physical, and financial toll of childhood sexual abuse. The journey that leads to healing is life long—often measured in decades, not just in years.

In the past few years, since the silence of sexual abuse has been shattered, more adults are openly sharing that they were sexually abused when they were a child. For some people, this may be the first time to discuss their childhood abuse and for others, it marks a long healing process as they find a voice to tell others about their journey.

If someone reveals to you that they were sexually abused, it is important to take the person seriously. When someone musters the courage to reveal they were sexually abused and then are not taken seriously, they may not risk disclosing again. As a result, the person could remain a silent victim of abuse for years or even a lifetime—often blaming themselves for the crimes committed against them. Therefore, it is vital to genuinely listen.

When a person first discloses their abuse history, it is not about your feelings or response. Give the support, comfort, and reassurance that it was not their fault. Let the person know how brave he or she was to tell you and that you understand how difficult it must have been to have the courage to discuss this matter.

Offering care and connection is very important. Contrary to what many may think, victims don't need or want anyone to feel sorry for them or to behave in a patronizing manner. Rather they need to feel as if their pain, frustration, shame, anger, resentment, humiliation, etc. is acknowledged and perhaps even understood. They need to have their feelings validated. They need an empathetic listener.

Listening empathetically means that, even if only for a moment, the listener absorbs, understands, and acknowledges the feelings the other person is experiencing. Empathetic listening requires listening for the meaning and the feelings that are attached to the speaker's words. To get to this point, you must "tune in" to the speaker and discard all personal opinions about how the speaker should or shouldn't feel or react.

When a victim of sexual abuse shares the story of what happened and the resulting damage, it is vital to clarify that his or her thoughts and feelings are completely validated in order for the healing process to proceed. Empathetic listening presumes that victims are capable of finding their own way and provides an opportunity for the victim to uncover his or her own answers. Giving the victim respect, trust, compassion, and generosity is a part of the gift of healing.

Although this article is directed toward listening to adults who reveal their abuse, it is also a good time to review what to do if the person disclosing is a child. Step 5 of the Plan to Protect God's Children is to "Communicate your Concerns." The intent of this step is to raise awareness about two different issues. The first issue is our responsibility—legal and moral—to report to state child protection services our suspicions that a child is being or has been abused. The rule is simple—REPORT! In many states, the law requires every adult to report suspected abuse (mandatory reporting). In other states, only those people with specific relationships to children such as teachers, day care workers, physicians, law enforcement officers, etc. are mandated to report, but everyone else is allowed to report. So when in doubt, report.

If the abuser is known to you, you may be tempted to try and solve the problem yourself. However, when individuals try to confront an abuser to stop sexual abuse themselves, they are almost always unsuccessful. The difficult but healthy way to deal with this problem is:

- Face the issue.
- Confront the problem to avoid future abuse.
- Report abuse to your local child protection service agency and ask about crisis support help.

Talking about sexual abuse can be very hard for the child who has been threatened or has been told by the abuser, who is often a trusted adult, not to tell. It can be just as difficult for adults to discuss abuse if the offender is someone close to them. Still, in the best interest of the child, the abuse needs to be reported, and the child needs to get help.



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