

Office of Safe Environment



Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

Spring 2015

Why Is There An Office Of Safe Environment?

This actually is a frequently asked question by newcomers, and there are even some long-standing members of the Church who are unsure why we have an Office of Safe Environment. Offices of Safe Environment all across the country are making a difference, and the results are all online and available for you to see.

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. 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.

Each year, Dioceses in the United States are audited for compliance. The results of these audits are published in an annual public report. The most recent report, as well as other reports related to this subject, may be found on the USCCB’s web site: www.usccb.org › at the bottom of the page, click on “Child and Youth Protection” › then down the left side of the page, click on “Reports and Research”.

The following language and statistics are from the USCCB’s web site under the “Audit” section regarding Safe Environment nationwide and its impact:

“Faced with the crisis of child sexual abuse by clerics that dramatically came to light in 2002, the church set up an aggressive safe environment program that is the envy of other organizations that work with children. From the annual audits, we can say the Catholic Church in the United States:

- **Trained more than 2.1 million clergy, employees, and volunteers in parishes in how to create safe environments and prevent child sexual abuse.**
- **Prepared more than 5.2 million children to recognize abuse and protect themselves.**
- **Ran background checks on more the 1,887,000 volunteers and employees, 166,000 educators, 52,000 clerics and 6,000 candidates for ordination.”**

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston has a Process Administrator (Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati) for the Office of Safe Environment and a full-time Office of Safe Environment Coordinator (Sharon Goudy) to help ensure the Diocese’s commitment to its children and young people and compliance with the Diocese’s Safe Environment Policy. In addition, at the local level, each parish, school, or organization appoints a local-level coordinator to carry out the Safe Environment process.

Deepest thanks to all who have roles in helping to make the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston safe!

A message from Sharon Goudy, Office of Safe Environment Coordinator

Greetings from the Office of Safe Environment ... Here’s hoping this finds you enjoying better weather after the freezing and icy winter we’ve experienced. Thank you all, so very much, for your warm welcome to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. It has been a pleasure meeting, speaking, and emailing with many of you since I came on board in early January. If I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting or speaking with you yet, I hope to do so soon. Please know that you are welcome to call (304.230.1504), email (sgoudy@dw.org), or stop by the Office of Safe Environment in Wheeling any time.

My sincerest thanks to Rev. Mr. Douglas Breiding, whose position I filled here in the Office of Safe Environment. Although Deacon Doug has been very busy in his new role as Director of Cemeteries for the Diocese, he has graciously offered to take the time to advise me through the most important phases of Safe Environment, as I continue on this learning curve. For that, I am sincerely appreciative. Here’s wishing you all a warm and sunny Spring.

Having Difficult Conversations

No one likes to deliver or receive bad news. Shock, pain, sorrow, hurt, disbelief, horror, anxiety, fear, embarrassment, rage, regret – any combination of these emotions, or others, may factor into the scenario unfolding before you as you deliver or receive bad news. Often, it is hard to even find the right words, let alone convey them calmly and effectively, when you are engaged in a difficult conversation, no matter the topic. Child sex abuse is generally not a topic people are enthusiastic about discussing with one another. The very nature of the Office of Safe Environment is about having difficult conversations, even simply to raise awareness. As uncomfortable as it may be, know this: the courageous choice to have a difficult conversation may change or save someone's life.

Sr. Ellen Dunn, O.P., Delegate for Consecrated Life, has worked within the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston for the past 21 years. She also is one of the Bishop's designees to receive reports of sex abuse, and she believes there are some steps people can take to help ease the burden of engaging in difficult conversations.

"It is a struggle for everybody sometimes – even to have a talk with your spouse or best friend," Sr. Ellen said.

Working on listening skills is always a good place to start, Sr. Ellen said. "Learn to be a listener. A lot of people have that skill. You need to be open to other people and their stories." Being a good listener includes being approachable, remaining calm, remaining focused on the facts and moment at hand, and offering no judgments.

Sharon Doty, J.D., M.H.R., states in the VIRTUS bulletin, "*The Right Reaction Can Make a Difference*," that when adults express concerns or children come forth directly with disclosures of abuse, "there is a tendency to react strongly, sometimes because of our concern for the children and what they might have suffered. However, listening carefully, avoiding a knee-jerk response, and encouraging and affirming the child for speaking up has long been recommended as the best way to support the child and begin to provide them with the help they need."

As adults, it also may be challenging to overcome cultural considerations and our own preconceived notions when embarking on a difficult conversation with someone, according to Sr. Ellen. A person's home or family environment or life experience may lead him or her to believe that certain behaviors - such as verbal, domestic, or sex abuse - are a normal part of every-day life. "Some of these things are never even reported because they are simply accepted. People think these things are ok when they are, in fact, not ok. How do you get past something like that?" Sr. Ellen said.

One way, she added, is for people in roles of leadership – including parents, teachers, and clergy - to set examples, especially through being good listeners, showing respect, showing compassion, not gossiping, and not judging someone based on their appearance or circumstances. "Learn someone's name." Sr. Ellen said. "Learning someone's name is very God-like. God calls us by name, and if you are not reflective about the assumptions you make about people, you could get into a lot of trouble." Actions such as these may help ease the discomfort of an adult expressing a concern or a victim coming forward to disclose abuse.

Many people find it extremely difficult to voice their concerns when they have suspicions of abuse. VIRTUS training online states: "A concern is not an accusation. Communicating concern is an important step toward preventing harm. Reporting is not the same thing as making an allegation. A report opens the door for specially-trained authorities to investigate the situation and provide appropriate intervention, if needed." Reporting also can be accomplished anonymously.

It sometimes is challenging for people to reconcile being Christians, yet being suspicious of others and their behaviors. "Pay attention to your intuition, and learn how to care for yourself and others," Sr. Ellen said. VIRTUS training online states: "Adults should maintain a healthy suspicion about the adults who regularly interact with the children and young people in their environments." A primary tactic of abusers is to ingratiate themselves into the church or community, so as to appear above reproach, and to make it difficult for anyone to believe or convey concerns.

Sr. Ellen also recommends role playing for anyone who has issues with difficult conversations. Finding a trusted source with whom to practice listening and conveying thoughts in a calm, factual manner may ease a person's fear and help develop confidence and courage for engaging in difficult conversations.

Being aware and communicating concerns - even if those concerns are difficult or painful for you or others to hear - can have a significant impact. VIRTUS training online reminds us: "In many cases, courageous reports rescue children from terrible torment and protect them from future abuse."

The Five Steps

Do you remember the five steps from your VIRTUS training?

1. **KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS** – refresh your memory by logging in to your VIRTUS account and looking up the signs of an inappropriate relationship.
2. **CONTROL ACCESS** – be careful about whom you allow to work with children.
3. **MONITOR ALL PROGRAMS** – provide supervision and follow policies and procedures for safety.
4. **BE AWARE** – pay attention to signs, changes in behavior, and what is going on around you. Law enforcement professionals call this Situational Awareness. Every person is capable of learning how to increase Situational Awareness. We will learn more about this in a future newsletter.
5. **COMMUNICATE YOUR CONCERNS** – tell someone ... as difficult as this step may be ... convey your concerns to the appropriate people. The other four steps won't really matter if you don't communicate your concerns or if you communicate them too late. (See above from VIRTUS and the Diocese's very own Sr. Ellen Dunn on tips for engaging in difficult conversations.)

Reporting

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact one of the Bishop's designees at: **304.233.0880 or 1.888.434.6237:**

- Sr. Ellen F. Dunn, O.P., ext. 264
- Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263
- Rev. Msgr. Frederick P. Annie, V.G., ext. 267
- Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati, STD, V.E., ext. 270

You may also fill out and return a confidential **Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor** by printing one from the Diocese's web site at www.dwc.org, then clicking Diocese › Offices › Office of Safe Environment › Download Files and Forms or by calling 304.230.1504 to request a form via U.S. mail from the Office of Safe Environment.

West Virginia Adult / Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.352.6513

VIRTUS

We talk about VIRTUS often in our Diocese, but do you actually know what it is? According to www.virtusonline.org, "VIRTUS is the brand name that identifies best practices programs designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote 'rightdoing' within religious organizations. The VIRTUS programs empower organizations and people to better control risk and improve the lives of all those who interact with the Church." The National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. created VIRTUS, which the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston uses as one of three components for compliance with its Safe Environment Policy and to raise awareness for recognizing the signs of abuse and for preventing abuse.

According to our friends at VIRTUS, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston is one of only five Dioceses in the United States served by VIRTUS that offers the "*Protecting God's Children*" session online. Considering the tremendous amount of area our Diocese encompasses, our many challenges with winter weather, and people's busy schedules, we are truly blessed to have this convenient and readily-available option for completing training and raising awareness.

Just to refresh your memory:

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 (Summer 2014)
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components (Background Check, Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children, and Awareness Training for Adults – VIRTUS) 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*."

Read All About It

Do you recall that there are certain roles which require continuing education and awareness, in addition to successful completion of the three components (Background Check, Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children, and Awareness Training for Adults – VIRTUS) mentioned herein? Continuing education and awareness are required for members of the Clergy, certain Diocesan employees, principals, teachers, certain school staff, directors of religious education, youth leaders/directors, and certain others in leadership roles with minors. This on-going training is accomplished online through the VIRTUS web site. Continuing education and awareness for those mentioned consist of a monthly bulletin that takes less than 15 minutes to read and complete through each individual's online VIRTUS account. If you have any questions or concerns about the monthly bulletins or your VIRTUS account, please email sgoudy@dw.org. It is super convenient to raise awareness and come into compliance and stay there!

Resources:

www.virtusonline.org – for monthly bulletins and online training

www.dwc.org - for the Diocese's "*Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children*" and related forms

www.usccb.org – for the "*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*" and related reports/documents

Touching 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 "**Touching 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.

If you are teaching Touching Safety, please recall that two lessons are taught each year. It is mandated that the first lesson be taught in the Fall (by the end of October). **The second lesson should be taught before the end of the school year.** There is flexibility as to when the second lesson is taught, but the first lesson must be taught by the end of October.

Remember that Opt-Out Letters must be sent to parents at least two weeks in advance of teaching a lesson.

The "Touching Safety" lesson cycle for the next several years is:

School Year **2014-15** ... **CYCLE ONE** ... Lesson One (by the end of October) and Lesson Two

School Year **2015-16** ... **CYCLE TWO** ... Lesson Three (by the end of October) and Lesson Four

School Year **2016-17** ... **CYCLE THREE** ... Lesson Five (by the end of October) and Lesson Six