

Office of Safe Environment



Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

Spring 2016

A message from Sharon Goudy, Office of Safe Environment Coordinator

Greetings from the Office of Safe Environment ... Here's hoping this finds you safe and well and happy. Do you know how easy it is to raise awareness? Our friends at the National Catholic Risk Retention Group have stated that raising awareness doesn't have to take hours and hours of your time. In fact, research shows that a very effective way to raise awareness is by simply reading short articles (or newsletters). Our awareness training provider, VIRTUS, has many short articles that offer lots of useful information. Please check out www.virtusonline.org.

Although some days remain a little chilly, many of you likely already have turned your thoughts to summer, especially summer camps and programs. Summer is a very busy time in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. Please ensure that all of your summer camp and summer program employees and volunteers are in compliance with Safe Environment prior to the start of activities.

As you know, our Diocese and Dioceses all across the United States are audited each year for Safe Environment compliance. Every three years, this process entails an on-site audit. 2016 is an on-site audit year for our Diocese. The audit agency is Stonebridge Partners, a designee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). We look forward to their arrival and greatly appreciate your help in achieving a successful audit for 2016.

The Office of Safe Environment continues to progress toward our goal of a new Safe Environment software platform as part of the ParishSOFT system. Presently, we are in the data conversion phase and are excited that our parishes and schools will be able to use the new platform soon. Thank you for your continued patience in this endeavor as it has unfolded over the past year.

Lastly, it is important for you to remain informed of the results of the Catholic Church's efforts on raising awareness and preventing sex abuse since this crisis broke in the early 2000s. Crispin Ketelhut, associate director of VIRTUS, wrote an article a couple of months ago that highlights progress that has been made.

Here's wishing you all a warm, wonderful spring.

Spotlight on the Catholic Church and Child Sexual Abuse - By Crispin Ketelhut, Associate Director, VIRTUS

"When a child becomes the victim of sexual abuse, it's always a tragedy and a serious tragedy. But even more so when it involves the Church. It's more tragic because that person, first of all, represents the Church and, for the young child, represents God. And so many times, we know, psychologically, the child cannot make the difference between seeing that coming from God and the Church... And we must be honest that sometimes the accusation that these cases have not been handled in a way that has been effective—in a way that has been just, must be admitted." —Archbishop Gregory Aymond (1)

The reality of child sexual abuse is devastating for many. As described by Archbishop Gregory Aymond, the Catholic Church has not always responded in the way it should have to cases of abuse.

The Catholic Church's proactive response in 2002 was the approval of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (Charter). Since then, there is substantial, tangible and consistent evidence that the Church has worked diligently to be a better protector of children. Efforts include, but are not limited to the fact that each diocese throughout the country now has a safe environment program to protect children, an avenue for healing and reconciliation for survivors, a streamlined process to swiftly respond to allegations, transparency in cooperating with civil authorities and measures to discipline offenders. (2)

Safe environment efforts now span the entire United States, and beyond. The reason we've come so far is because of each and every one of you, and your commitment toward the protection of children. It means that:



- When you're coaching and teaching our youth, you recognize proper boundaries and work to uphold them.
- When you decide to volunteer at your youth's school, you willingly participate in standard screening measures such as a background check.
- When you're volunteering within faith formation and youth ministry, you ensure that your actions and behavior are transparent.
- Even though you haven't done anything wrong, you might modify your behavior to ensure that a child isn't more susceptible to inappropriate behavior from someone else.
- You're brave when it comes time to communicate your concerns about questionable behavior—and you keep communicating if it appears that nothing is being done.
- You're willing to participate in training to learn warning signs and trust your instincts.

If you've ever completed safe environment training in a live setting, read one of the training bulletins, completed a module or recertification, listened to someone recount their story, held a survivor's hand as they suffer, etc.—you've been a part of these efforts to protect the vulnerable by learning more about the problem and what you can do about it.

Did you know that 6,907 victim survivors have come forward to tell their stories since the publication of the Charter? (3) There will likely be more. Thus it is crucial to reflect on the great power we each have when communicating with others about the subject of child sexual abuse. If you haven't already had the privilege, you may one day have a peer choose you or even a young person, to receive a disclosure about the abuse that occurred to them. You'll be presented with this gift that took great courage, and you will have a choice in how you respond to assist the person. It is our hope that you'll think back to the steps you learned in your safe environment training. For example, let the person talk, and listen carefully. Address the person's feelings, and let them know that you trust and believe them. Limit questions. Do offer discretion; don't offer confidentiality. Depending on the situation, you may need to report the information, with discretion.

Because you've participated in the safe environment training, you're also now more aware of red-flag behaviors and the proper avenues to communicate your concerns.

For example:

- If you're aware of an adult exhibiting behavior that is against the code of conduct, speak directly to the person and/or speak to a supervisor.
- If you're aware that a child is in immediate danger, call 911.
- If you're not positive, but you suspect that a child is being abused, call the child abuse hotline for the area.
- If you suspect or know a child is being, or has been abused by a diocesan employee or volunteer, first call the child abuse hotline, and then notify the diocese to potentially remove the person from public ministry during the investigation.

If, and when, you are faced with any of these types of situations, you'll have the ability to be a conduit of hope and healing. Your reactions have the potential to positively or negatively affect a victim survivor's reality—and your response can have long-lasting effects into his or her future.

Thank you for your willingness to be a protector of children. There's a word in Spanish that is used frequently to express hope and encouragement among friends. The word is "¡Ánimo!" and it's also used when a friend tells another that they can do something, that they're almost at the finish line or that they do have the strength needed for a task.

And so this story continues, because we certainly aren't finished. You can do this. We will continue to work to protect children, and we'll do it together. ¡Ánimo!

References:

- 1 - Video interview with the VIRTUS Programs. (2002). Protecting God's Children Program DVD; National Catholic Services, LLC.
- 2 - Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. (2011 Revision). Found at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>
- 3 - Annual Audit Statistics; Compilation of data from 2004-2014. (2014). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

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

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

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 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.”*

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 this year and next is:

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