



Diocese of Las Vegas Office of the Bishop

Statement from the Most Reverend Joseph A. Pepe, D.D., J.C.D.

In November, 2002 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in Washington, D.C., developed the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. Later that same year, The Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons was developed.

In order to insure implementation of the Charter and to meet the commitment of safety for all parish children and members, church leaders demanded immediate action from all diocesan parishes and schools. We again recommit ourselves as the Diocese of Las Vegas to that mandate. The Diocese of Las Vegas continues to implement the *Virtus* Program.

“*Virtus*” is the brand name that identifies best practices programs designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote ‘right doing’ within religious organizations” (created by the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc.).

The *Virtus* Program is designed to assist the church community in creating an environment of safety, with particular attention placed on children and youth and the adults working with them.

Implementation of the program requires a personal response from those involved. Successful implementation requires not only completion of the work, and achievement of the objectives, but also to see our children, and their care, with new vision earned through commitment, learning and action.

While the creation of an ‘environment of safety’ has been outlined by the goals and objectives in the *Virtus* Program, the values we as individuals, place in reflecting the work in every day practice will determine the foundation. As the jobs and tasks evolve into common thought and practice, a culture of responsibility, trust, honesty and safekeeping will emerge.

A safe environment includes adults who are educated about and sensitive to the physical, emotional, and psychological vulnerability of children. A safe environment includes adults who have acquired a learned perspective and have at their disposal techniques and tools that address the needs of those at risk. *Virtus* can provide the education, in part, with the initial training and the ongoing support of the online bulletins, but key to maintaining awareness and vigilance, is the full commitment of adults who value and promise safekeeping for God's children.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Vegas is committed to safekeeping of our children. In place are policies that clearly outline the responsible behavior of all employees and volunteers working in our community.

In keeping with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' mandate and to further assist our efforts in providing for the safety of children, the following best practices are in place:

- The diocese employs a Victim Advocate/Safe Environment Coordinator.
- Those in need of abuse advocacy, and/or counseling have 24-hour accessibility via the telephone number published in all church bulletins, the Employee Handbook and on the diocesan website.
- Anti-harassment misconduct and confidentiality policies are applicable to all employees and volunteers.
- All guidelines are available in English and Spanish.
- All employees undergo a background check and those working with children must participate in the Protecting God's Children training.
- All volunteers must undergo a background check, and those working with children must undertake the Protecting God's Children training and participate in a bulletin program.
- All churches and schools participate in the Save Environment certification process through the completion of quarterly reports and annual reviews.
- Staff evaluation instruments include criteria indicating satisfaction of all Safe Environment requirements.
- Touching Safety educational programs are provided to every K – 12 student. Exceptions to this are children whose parents have signed Opt Out forms.

The procedures and lessons of *Virtus* and the diocese, combined with the support of family, and the church community, will serve to protect our children and to help our children develop a reasonable interest in their personal safety and, should abuse threaten them, tools to aid.

Lessons will be provided by the appropriate staff/volunteers (as outlined by the parish/school). Appropriate procedures and any required support to Safe Environment staff and educators will be provided by *Virtus*, the diocesan educational program, and the diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator. Our children will grow with the church community with knowledge of personal development, and comprehensive safety awareness that will provide for an open and safe environment within our community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Joseph A. Pepe, D.D., J.C.D.
Bishop of Las Vegas