



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## DIocese OF BRIDGEPORT

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November 30, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As Catholics, we share a sacred obligation to protect the children, youth and vulnerable adults in our community.

In the Diocese of Bridgeport our Safe Environment program and victim assistance ministry has been in place since 2003, and it has made great strides in prevention, detection and early intervention efforts. However, we constantly face new challenges, the need to update existing policies, to incorporate best practices and to integrate Safe Environment measures in everything that we do.

With that mandate, I am re-promulgating the diocesan Safe Environments policies and practices for the protection of children and young people. The formal decree has been issued on November 30, and the new policy will become effective immediately.

Therefore, the Diocese of Bridgeport is issuing a newly revised set of guidelines and procedures that are consistent with the revisions to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Our updated Safe Environment policies are now found in a single handbook that includes local implementation guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' audit process, the mandatory reporting procedures and laws of the State of CT and updates to the 2003 Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Policy and the 2004 Code of Conduct.

The updated *Safe Environment Handbook* will be widely distributed throughout the Diocese in print form and also available online at [www.bridgeportdiocese.com](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.com)

Our goal is to reinforce the Diocese of Bridgeport's efforts to ensure the safest possible environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults through awareness training and by strengthening all of our prevention initiatives. This will ensure that adults and minors have important information on how to identify warning signs of abuse while using technology, and how to properly report suspected abuse to the Diocese and to Civil authorities.

While we have had a comprehensive outreach in place, the re-promulgation of the Safe Environment Program includes the following initiatives:

- Updated VIRTUS Safe Environment training will be required in person or online for all employees and volunteers who were trained more than five years ago. Ongoing retraining



every five (5) or ten (10) years will be required, depending upon the type of ministry or work performed by each employee or volunteer.

- Annual continuing education on a variety of topics related to safe environment issues including the safe use of technology. This annual education will be done online and will be required of all clergy, employees and volunteers who have scheduled contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- Renewal of criminal background checks every five (5) or ten (10) years based on the specific category of personnel.
- Issuance of a revised Safe Environment Handbook, which will serve as an implementation guide with updates to our Sexual Misconduct Policy and Code of Conduct on the safe use of technology & mandated reporting of suspected child abuse and child pornography. All adults who work or volunteer in any capacity in the Diocese of Bridgeport must review and verify their acceptance of the Handbook. The Handbook must be re-signed whenever a person changes role, assignment or location within the Diocese.
- Distribution of new Safe Environment brochures that will be made available in parishes on warning signs of abuse and reporting procedures.
- Reconstitution of the diocesan Sexual Misconduct Review Board to include regular meetings, revised term limits and frequent policy review.
- Continued requirement that all independent contractors, vendors and tenants complete training and undergo background checks.

We will also continue to verify that all of our independent contractors, vendors and tenants clear a criminal background check through their company, and in cases where they do not have a process, we will assist them with establishing a background check process. In 2015 we will work to centralize this process by recording the dates of all background checks into the VIRTUS database.

In the Diocese of Bridgeport we continue to use the *VIRTUS, Protecting God's Children* program to educate adults about the warning signs of sexual abuse and safe boundaries that all adults must adhere to when working with minors and vulnerable adults. This fall, VIRTUS updated their program and has issued version 3.0 to include technology and social networking safety. VIRTUS will continue to be the initial training program required for all members of the Clergy, Men in Formation, Religious Sisters and Brothers, Lay employees and Volunteers.

Parents and children also play an important role in preventing abuse. All children enrolled in the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Bridgeport receive annual Safe Environment training utilizing the Child Lures Prevention, *Think First & Stay Safe*\_(K-8). High School students receive Personal Safety Training utilizing *Think First* & the *Netsmartz* program on technology safety. Parents with children enrolled in religious education are encouraged to attend Safe Environment

training to supplement the *Healthy and Balanced Living* Curriculum that their child receives in CT schools.

We realize that we may not prevent every incident of abuse from occurring in the future; however, our goal is to create a Safe Environment which we believe will significantly reduce the chances that the early warning signs of abuse will go unnoticed or unreported.

We have made great strides to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children entrusted to our care and I am grateful for your support and cooperation with the renewal of these efforts. I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Frank J. Caggiano*

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano  
Bishop of Bridgeport