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Preface

Cardinal Francis George, OMI
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Catholic Church in the United States has completed its seventh consecutive year of external audits of its dioceses and eparchies to ascertain their compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This Annual Report details the audit process and provides a picture of the compliance status of our individual dioceses and eparchies. The efforts show the *Charter* and its articles are integrated into our life as the Catholic Church in the United States; the articles are not just something we do for the purpose of the audits. That is a sign of the progress we have made, and it is good news.

Since the first audits of 2003, the audit process has evolved to verify the existence of safe environment training and background evaluations of clerics, employees, and volunteers in the Church. The number of children now equipped with the skills to protect themselves more effectively is larger than ever and continues to grow. Through the *Charter* the bishops have made clear that it has been and always will be our responsibility to ensure the protection of our children and young people.

It is the hope of the bishops that others who deal with children and young people might emulate the safety measures implemented by the Catholic Church: for instance, by establishing codes of conduct, policies and procedures for the prompt reporting and handling of allegations, safe environment training, and background evaluations. Building safety barriers around children is an effective wall of protection from harm. We, as members of the Church, should rejoice in what we have achieved even as we are mindful that is not an accomplishment that leads to a lessening of our efforts. Those efforts will continue.

Reports of abuse that occurred in the past are a cause of great sadness and a stimulus to continued vigilance in the future. They remind us that our first and most important task is to reach out to those who have suffered abuse at the hands of the clergy. The bishops put this task as the first article in the *Charter*. Assisting in the reconciliation and healing of the victims/survivors is something we must always do, not because of the *Charter* and the audit process, but because Jesus Christ teaches us that this is the task of all faithful disciples.

The faithful can be assured that the bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States remain committed to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and what it promises. May God sustain our efforts.