

# Office of Safe Environment

A N N U A L R E P O R T

2019-2020





April 30, 2021

## Letter from Bishop Barry C. Knestout

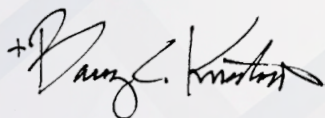


Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Safe Environment Annual Report for 2020 demonstrates our commitment to implement effective actions to protect our children and vulnerable adults from the scourge of sexual abuse. This is accomplished through extensive background screenings and educational training of our employees and volunteers in accordance with the USCCB's "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." Child sexual abuse is a horror, and our efforts are of paramount importance.

We join our hearts in sorrow with the victim survivors of sexual abuse. As St. Paul writes, "when one member of the body suffers, all suffer" (1 Cor 12:26). But solidarity in sorrow is not enough. The Lord calls all of us, from his agony on the cross, to walk with these victim survivors, to help those who are wounded and to bring compassion and healing.

We are committed to addressing the needs of those who have suffered due to clergy abuse and to ensure a safe environment in which all children are allowed to thrive. We unite in spirit with the USCCB in making a "Promise to Protect" and a "Pledge to Heal."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Barry C. Knestout".

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout



## Office of Safe Environment



I am pleased to present the Office of Safe Environment Annual Report, which summarizes the work of the office during the reporting year of July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020.

We continue to join with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in its commitment to prevent the sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse of minors and the vulnerable and to heal those who have been abused by clergy or Church personnel across the Diocese of Richmond. Background screening and VIRTUS training requirements for clergy, employees and volunteers remain a high priority to ensure that we have trusted employees and volunteers carrying out the work of the Church.

Covid-19 affected many people's mental and physical wellbeing. To combat issues of loneliness and thoughts of suicide, it was imperative for us to minister online and continue our outreach work. Faced with the challenges of these unprecedented times, our aim to be available to victim survivors remained consistent. We offered outreach via telephone and video conferences. The work of the Diocesan Review Board continued virtually. VIRTUS training was offered through online modules and facilitator - led video conferences.

In compliance with the requirements of the USCCB's "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," we continue to evaluate and improve all aspects of our Safe Environment Program. We have tightened our policies and procedures, and this is reflected through the annual audit review.

I offer my sincere gratitude to all the faithful for their support and work in safeguarding God's children.

**Nazia Shafi, Director, Office of Safe Environment**



## Diocesan Review Board

As members of the Diocesan Review Board, we assist Bishop Knestout in his sacred obligation to protect children and the vulnerable, and to provide accountability and transparency in meeting the requirements of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

There are several essential guiding components to our work: accountability, protection, healing, outreach, education and transparency. While the Catholic Church has made unparalleled strides in ensuring that children are safe since the 2002 implementation of the "Charter," vigilance is always needed. We cannot be complacent.

Only the actions of everyone involved in the work of the Church — especially its leaders — will change how our Church is viewed by its members and society. Our actions will help survivors and their families to heal. Our actions will re-establish trust.

With this report, we hope to reflect the transparency expected, to educate all in the efforts of how we protect the children entrusted to our care and to continue to heal the Body of Christ.

**Ron Vessell, Chair, Diocesan Review Board**



# Victim Assistance Outreach

2020 Annual Report (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

The Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC) assists in fulfilling the mission of the Church to walk with each victim survivor on their journey towards healing and wholeness. Allegations of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults by a priest, deacon, or other Church personnel that are disclosed to the VAC are reported to the bishop.

## Diocesan Review Board

The Review Board assists the bishop in examining and assessing these allegations. During this reporting year, the Review Board met bimonthly and reviewed **11** cases of allegations of sexual abuse of minors.

- **Two** allegations were made against lay employees, these cases were found credible.
- **One** allegation was not credible, it was found that the priest had committed a violation of the “Code of Ethical Conduct”.
- **Eight** allegations involved clergy, and all cases were found credible. The priests involved in 7 of these cases had been previously reported to the diocese, and their names had been added to the diocesan “List of all Clergy with Credible and Substantiated Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors”. One of these cases involved a priest who had no prior allegations of abuse brought against him. Since this case was found credible, the priest’s name was added to this list. For more information visit <https://richmonddiocese.org/list/>.

## Independent Reconciliation Program

As a separate and distinct process from the work of the Diocesan Review Board, with the purpose of healing and reconciliation, a new program of compensation for victim survivors, the Independent Reconciliation Program (IRP), was announced in February 2020. Victim survivors of past sexual abuse that had occurred in the Diocese of Richmond had the opportunity to come forward and disclose their abuse allegations.

Though it is impossible to undo the horrific wounds of the past, this program was designed to help victim survivors in a confidential setting where their disclosure of abuse was secure and respectful. The administrators of this program, BrownGreer, were fully independent from the Diocese of Richmond and had full autonomy to determine the amount of monetary compensation for eligible claims.

The results of the Program are as follows:

- Total Number of Claims Initiated: **68**
- Total Number of Claims Ineligible: **6**
- Claims Withdrawn or Never Completed: **2**
- Total Number of Eligible Claims Submitted: **60**
- Number of Claims Denied by Administrator: **9**
- Number of Offers Made: **51**
- Number of Offers Accepted: **51**
- Total Monetary Payments to Victim Survivors: **\$6,300,000**

For more information on the Independent Reconciliation Program, visit <https://assistance.richmonddiocese.org>.



## National Child Abuse Prevention Month

On April 24, 2020, the Office of Safe Environment held its annual Blue Friday to show support in promoting a happy childhood for all as part of its observance of National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Despite social distancing and other COVID-19 safety protocols, nearly 100 individuals participated in this initiative by wearing blue and submitting a photo which was compiled into this pinwheel mosaic. More than 60 images, representing 22 individual diocesan offices, parishes and schools, were pieced together. The blue pinwheel is a national symbol for Child Abuse Prevention Month. It symbolizes the joy and innocence of childhood.

## Code of Ethical Conduct (February 2020)

On February 27, 2020, Bishop Barry C. Knestout promulgated the Diocese of Richmond's "Code of Ethical Conduct for Church Personnel." The policy outlined clear expectations for ethical and professional standards of conduct for all Church personnel and volunteers to follow under one comprehensive policy and to further strengthen integrity in ministry.

The "Code of Ethical Conduct," in both English and Spanish, is available on the diocesan website: <https://richmonddiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Diocese-of-Richmond-Code-of-Ethical-Conduct.pdf>

## Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service (CBAR) (March 2020)

Pope Francis' apostolic letter, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi" ("You Are the Light of the World"), addressed the issue of sexual abuse and bishop accountability on a global scale. "Vos Estis" set norms for metropolitan archbishops to assume when receiving and accessing reports involving bishops that concern sexual abuse and misconduct allegations.

The Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service (CBAR) was established following approval by the U.S. bishops to implement a plan for carrying out the directives established in "Vos Estis." Run by a third-party reporting service, CBAR reports are forwarded to the local metropolitan archbishop who is responsible for investigating reports involving bishops.

The Diocese of Richmond is a suffragan diocese of the Province of Baltimore. Archbishop William E. Lori of the Archdiocese of Baltimore is the metropolitan who presides over the province.

With the introduction of CBAR, the Diocese of Richmond began promoting the reporting system in March 2020 on its digital platforms and its newspaper, The Catholic Virginian. More information can be found at [www.richmonddiocese.org/reporting](http://www.richmonddiocese.org/reporting).





# Safe Environment Initiatives and Statistics 2019-2020

## BACKGROUND SCREENINGS COMPLETED

VOLUNTEERS 3,415  
EMPLOYEES 432

34,850

ACTIVE SAFE  
ENVIRONMENT  
PARTICIPANTS

## VIRTUS

6,135

CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
STUDENTS  
TRAINED  
Empowering  
God's Children  
Program

3,129

ADULTS  
TRAINED  
Protecting God's  
Children Program

## ANNUAL SAFE ENVIRONMENT BUDGET

\$310,483

147

FACILITATORS  
3 new Facilitators trained  
19 bilingual Facilitators

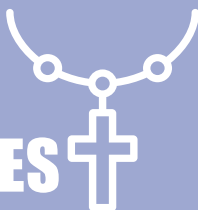
3,997

VIRTUS training  
sessions since  
2004

61,427

VIRTUS trained  
employees and  
volunteers since  
2004

## ROSARY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



In observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month, Bishop Knestout led the rosary from the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Richmond, on April 2, 2020. This event was livestreamed through diocesan social media. The video has received more than **2,800** views as of April 30, 2021.



## ANNUAL USCCB AUDIT

The diocese has been in full compliance with the audit every year since 2004, including this reporting year of 2019-2020. For more information, visit: <https://richmonddiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-Data-Collection-Audit-Letter-Compliance-1.pdf>.



The work of our ministries continued virtually during COVID-19. Guidelines were introduced for ministering online to minors.



#### Consider Your Attire

Plan to wear what you would have worn to the meet up had you attended in person.



#### Consider Your Location

Plan to engage in online forums from public areas of your house - dining room, office space, living room, etc. The backdrop should be free from adult related paraphernalia, such as signs or displays of alcoholic beverages.



#### Consider Your Platform

Limit your contact with minors to public platforms such as Google Hangouts, Zoom, or Flocknotes. Direct, private connections, such as FaceTime are discouraged.

## Ministering Online to Minors



### Creating a Safe Environment Online



#### How Meet Ups are Scheduled

Schedule online face-to-face contact with minors in advance through a group forum and with the knowledge/permission of parents or guardians.



#### How they Contact You

Avoid sharing personal contact information, instead provide minors with parish or group related email addresses or accounts.



#### Who has Access to Your Meet Ups

Arrange to host group meet ups and always provide parents with links/access to the meeting ups, emails, and other messages.

## Bishop Barry C. Knestout to celebrate Masses for Hope and Healing

During this time of heightened concern for the safety of our children and families, the Office of Safe Environment invites you to participate in Masses for Hope and Healing to be celebrated in all three vicariates across the Diocese of Richmond.

Bishop Knestout will pray for healing and reconciliation for victims of abuse, their families and our larger Church family. We hope you will join us as we continue to pray for healing of individuals who have survived abuse, for those who support them, and for continued vigilance for the protection of all our children and youth.

**More information will be available at  
[www.richmonddiocese.org](http://www.richmonddiocese.org).**

## Reporting Information

In a commitment to support and facilitate healing, individuals who have been sexually abused by a cleric, religious, employee, or volunteer of the Diocese of Richmond, are encouraged to contact the **Civil Authorities, Child Protective Services (CPS) at 1-800-552-7096** and the **Victim Assistance Reporting line at 1-877-887-9603**. In addition, we place no deadlines or time limits on those who contact the diocese to report the sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons or other Church personnel.

# Office of Safe Environment



## Contact Information

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