

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RICHMOND
Office of Safe Environment
A N N U A L R E P O R T

2020-2021



April 1, 2022

Letter from Bishop Barry C. Knestout



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The ongoing commitment of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond to protect the most vulnerable among us from the tragedy of sexual abuse is summarized in this Safe Environment Annual Report for the period of July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2021. Recognizing that each individual is created by God, the diocese works vigilantly to minimize risk and to foster a culture of awareness and responsibility.

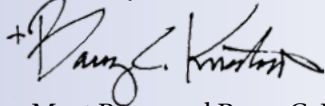
The Office of Safe Environment reviewed its policies and procedures, and formally revised its regulations as part of its continued effort to strengthen the office's work for the protection of the vulnerable. In addition, two training programs were initiated to enhance awareness and promote responsibility.

The Office of Safe Environment held virtual forums with every location in the diocese to introduce these new programs, and to ensure compliance with required background screenings and VIRTUS training of all employees and volunteers. An onsite U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' audit by independent auditors was completed in 2021 in order to ensure transparency and accountability.

Our diocese was again found to be in compliance with the USCCB's "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

We remain committed to offering compassionate support and justice to those who have suffered abuse by clergy, religious, or lay Church personnel. We pray that they experience the extraordinary healing powers of God as they journey toward healing. At the same time, we continue our commitment to ensure a safe environment for all.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout

Mass for Hope & Healing at St. Thomas Aquinas, Charlottesville.



Office of Safe Environment



Establishing safe environments is foundational to creating a place of trust and safety that encourages faith to take root and thrive. The gift and responsibility of bestowing this type of safety is of utmost importance for the wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. The Catholic Diocese of Richmond prides itself for being proactive in its mission to protect the vulnerable across our parishes and schools.

In this past year, the Office of Safe Environment has introduced many new initiatives and remains vigilant in its efforts to safeguard the most vulnerable. This annual report highlights the work completed, and improvements made, in providing safe environments across the diocese.

Safeguarding the most vulnerable is the responsibility of the entire church. We remain focused in our commitment to support anyone suffering from abuse by clergy, religious, or lay Church personnel. We place our trust in Christ, our light, and our hope. May we continue to be united in prayer, asking for God's blessing upon all children and vulnerable adults.

Thank you for supporting the mission of our ministry.

Nazia Shafi, Director, Office of Safe Environment

Our ministry serves to help fulfill the mission of the Church to walk with each victim survivor on their journey toward healing and wholeness. This past year, we offered compassionate and respectful outreach to victim survivors of child sexual abuse, perpetrated by our Church personnel, during their disclosure process. We were a supportive presence and advocate throughout the Review Board process and thereafter. We provided referrals and made arrangements for counseling services for many of these individuals. We supported Bishop Knestout in his mission to celebrate Masses for Hope and Healing for victim survivors and their families. In addition, a program of Support Groups for these victim survivors was initiated in the fall of 2021 to allow for an opportunity for further healing of the heart and soul. These groups offer a safe space for individuals to gather to offer strength and support for one another.



Our victim survivors carry the deepest of wounds, and we share in their sorrow. It is impossible to understand or undo the heinous actions committed against them. We pray to God our Father, that with his divine love and guidance, we will work to foster healing and restore trust.

Karen Loper, Victim Assistance Coordinator

“The Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

— Psalm 147:3

Victim Assistance Outreach

Diocesan Review Board

The bishop relies on the work of the Diocesan Review Board while formulating his decisions about allegations. He looks to the Review Board for consultation, advice, and insight in handling allegations. He also seeks the assistance of the Review Board to address all aspects of sexual abuse of minors.

"I am honored to serve with fellow Catholics dedicated to fulfilling the themes of the 'Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People' – the themes of protection, accountability, transparency and healing."

Ron Vessell, M.Ed, L.P.C.
Chair, Diocesan Review Board

During this Annual Report period, the Review Board* assessed 31 allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, religious, or lay personnel of the Diocese of Richmond. Of these 31 allegations, 29 were allegations of past abuse brought forward through the IRP process in 2020. Two were recent allegations made against lay Church personnel.

- 20 allegations were found credible
 - 5 allegations were found not credible
 - 6 allegations were found inconclusive; there was not enough information to make a determination
- Of these 31 allegations, three were made against lay Church personnel:
- 1 allegation was found credible
 - 1 allegation was found not credible
 - 1 allegation was found inconclusive

*For more information about the Diocesan Review Board, please visit <https://richmonddiocese.org/diocesan-review-board>.

The Review Board is composed of seven members. All the members are individuals recognized for their integrity, good judgement and respect for the Catholic Church. The majority of members are lay persons not in the employ of the diocese. The members are asked to serve for three years, and the term is renewable with a limit of three terms. During this Annual Report period, the Review Board received refresher VIRTUS training.

Jim Cervera is the most recent appointment to the Review Board by Bishop Knestout on February 24, 2021.

"I am honored to serve in my role on the Review Board and know that we are assisting the Church and the victim survivors."

Jim Cervera, Former Virginia Beach Police Chief
Diocesan Review Board

Mass for Hope & Healing

As part of his ongoing support and commitment, Bishop Knestout celebrated Masses for Hope and Healing for victim survivors of abuse and their families across the three vicariates of the Diocese of Richmond.

Masses were celebrated at Our Lady of Nazareth, Roanoke, the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, and St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish, Charlottesville. Counselors were

available to speak to victim survivors before and after Mass. Bishop Knestout spoke with victim survivors after the Hope and Healing Masses to offer further compassionate support.

We came together as a community and prayed 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 the most vulnerable.

Bishop Knestout will continue to celebrate a Mass for Hope and Healing each year.

Victim Survivor Support Group

On Thursday, November 11, 2021, the Office of Safe Environment hosted its first Victim Survivor Support Group meeting in the Eastern Vicariate. The Office made every effort to reach out to all victim survivors of clergy, religious, or lay Church personnel residing in the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, inviting them to participate in the meeting. Spouses and other support persons were also welcomed. Support Groups are an ongoing initiative by the Diocese of Richmond. They offer a safe space for victim survivors and their families to share personal experiences and feelings, as well as coping strategies used to help with healing processes.

Child Abuse Prevention Month



For National Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Diocese of Richmond collaborated with Greater Richmond SCAN (Stop Child Abuse Now) in helping raise awareness for child abuse and neglect. Pastoral Center staff supported SCAN by donating snacks to distribute to children in their programs who have been physically or sexually abused and who are in the process of receiving treatment and other services.

The Office of Safe Environment was able to provide a SCAN training program, “Stewards of Children Training,” which is dedicated to the awareness and prevention of child abuse. This training was one of a number of initiatives offered by the Office of Safe Environment with the hope of raising awareness, while providing tools to help prevent child abuse. Much has been accomplished in creating safe environments for children and youth, but our work continues, and it is lifelong.



On April 14, 2021, we put forward our intercessions to Mary, Mother of Mercy, to bring healing and wholeness to those who have been victims of child abuse. The Most Rev. Barry C. Knestout led the Rosary from the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Richmond. The Rosary was dedicated in observance of National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The livestream was broadcast on the Diocese of Richmond's digital platforms.

“Prayer with Mary, especially the Rosary, has this “suffering” dimension, that is of struggle, a sustaining prayer in the battle against the evil one and his accomplices.”

— Pope Francis, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption (August 15, 2013)

Safe Environment Initiatives and Statistics

Training Programs

Boundaries Module for Youth Who are Employees or Assisting/Volunteers

The Office of Safe Environment worked in collaboration with VIRTUS to design a new training program for teens entitled “Boundaries Module for Youth Who are Employees or Assisting/Volunteers.” This became an official component of our Safe Environment program, embodied in our Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations, on April 19, 2021. This online training module is available for teenagers between the ages of 13 to 17 years old. It is an age-appropriate training program where teens learn about maintaining appropriate boundaries, awareness of inappropriate behavior, and proper reporting procedures. This program is highly encouraged for teen volunteers, but is mandatory for teen employees, to be completed within 30 days of the start of employee or volunteer assignment. A Spanish version of this training module is also available.

Protecting God’s Children for Adults 4.0

The Office of Safe Environment worked with VIRTUS to ensure the smooth adoption of the “Protecting God’s Children for Adults” 4.0. On September 16, 2021, Bishop Knestout promulgated the updated program.

The updated program using the latest technology includes a new survivor’s story, a parishioner’s story, added emphasis on the importance of maintaining

appropriate boundaries, and a change in terminology. The overall message of hope, healing, prevention, and empowerment remains the same.

This program provides a more positive impact on parishes and schools within our diocese, and on the individuals themselves who are called to be an extension of the bishop’s mission to protect the children and youth of the diocese.

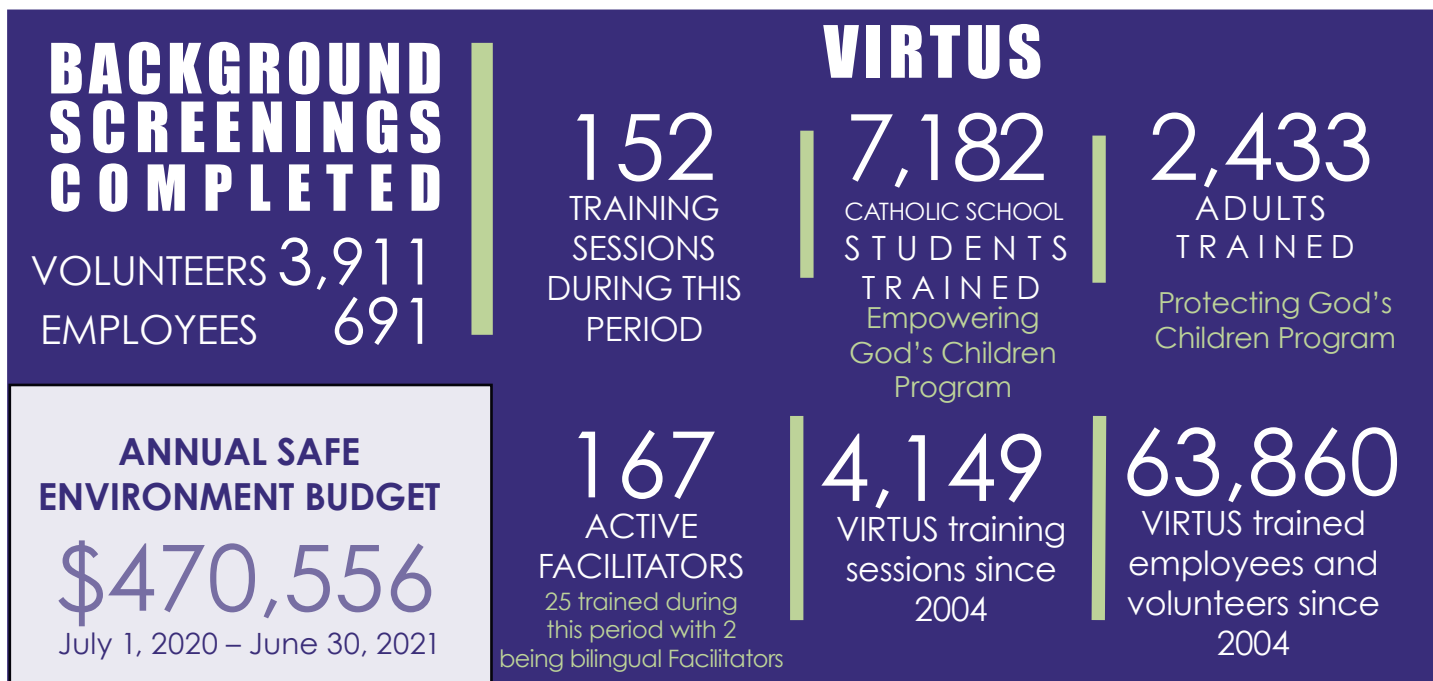
Vulnerable Adults Training Module

On September 20, 2021, the Office of Safe Environment announced a new online VIRTUS training module available to those volunteers and employees who work with vulnerable adult populations. The online module, “Vulnerable Adults Training Module,” describes various definitions of vulnerable adults, as well as the reality and context of abuse of these individuals. In addition, five steps and best practice actions are presented to help adults understand proper behavior to prevent abuse and to respond appropriately if made aware of a problem. The purpose of this training is to foster a safe environment for any activity involving vulnerable adults and to encourage appropriate boundaries for adults and caregivers.

For more information about our training programs, visit <https://richmonddiocese.org/registering-for-an-upcoming-virtus-training-program>.



Safe Environment Statistics (July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2021)



USCCB Audit

In 2021, the Diocese of Richmond completed a Data Collection and Onsite Audit in accord with the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. The modified Onsite Audit was for the period of July 1, 2018 to September 30, 2021. The diocese was found to be in compliance with all the articles within the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” The next data collection will be in 2022 and the next onsite audit will take place in 2024.

Revised Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations, 2021

In its continuing commitment to improve the protection of children and vulnerable adults in the diocese, the Office of Safe Environment revised its Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations in 2021. The previous revision had been completed in 2018. Bishop Knestout promulgated this revised document on April 1, 2021. These regulations

strengthened policies while working in collaboration with other diocesan offices. In addition to our VIRTUS Teen Program, other new initiatives were introduced: *Sex Offenders on Church Property*, *Safe Virtual Meetings with Minors*, *Volunteers with high level of responsibilities*, and *Use of Church Property by Unaffiliated Organizations*.

Safe Environment Forums

Starting in January 2021, and continuing through June 2021, the Office of Safe Environment conducted virtual meetings with every parish and school in the diocese. The purpose of these meetings was to address compliance issues, introduce new training programs and provide updates on the revisions to the Safe Environment Regulations. This was also an opportunity to build relationships and improve communication going forward.

A PROMISE
TO PROTECT.
A PLEDGE
TO HEAL.

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

Nazia Shafi: Director of Safe Environment
Catholic Diocese of Richmond
7800 Carousel Lane
Richmond, Virginia 23294

Phone: 1-804-359-5661 | email: nshafi@richmonddiocese.org