

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RICHMOND

# Office of Safe Environment

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

2022





April 1, 2023

## Letter from Bishop Barry C. Knestout

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Protecting our children and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse has been of highest priority for our diocese during the five years I have served as your bishop. This Safe Environment Annual Report for 2022 illustrates that ongoing commitment.

Our protective efforts include extensive background screenings for employees and volunteers. In addition, our Safe Environment program raises awareness of child abuse and provides steps for its prevention through its educational component. This is all done in accord with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

Building upon the initiatives our Safe Environment Office has already implemented, we introduced, this year, *Virtus Teaching Safety-Empowering God's Children*, a valuable training program for children and youth in our parishes. This program which is part of our Catholic Schools curriculum, assists children and youth in being aware of possible abuse situations, understanding personal boundaries and how to protect themselves from untoward advance. We are pleased to have extended this training to our parish communities.

While we are steadfast in making all Church environments safe, we continue to be more fully engaged with those who have suffered abuse at the hands of clergy, religious or lay Church personnel. We connect with survivors to allow them access to the resources and the compassionate support they need to begin or continue their healing journey.

We have learned from mistakes of the past. We safeguard against complacency and practice a culture of vigilance. We continue to create safe environments where the vulnerable can be given the dignity and respect they deserve as children of God - where they can develop to their full potential.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barry C. Knestout". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout



## OFFICE OF SAFE ENVIRONMENT

*“Christ has no*

*body on earth*

*now but yours, no*

*hands, no feet but*

*yours; yours are*

*the eyes through*

*which he looks*

*with compassion*

*on this world.”*



I want to begin by thanking the faithful for their continued support for the work of the Office of Safe Environment and for assisting us in sustaining our mission. Our zero-tolerance policies have played a major part in creating a culture of protection and healing across the diocese.

During this annual report period we introduced the *Teaching Safety - Empowering God's Children* program in our parish communities. We are grateful to our parish staff, volunteers, parents, and guardians for their acceptance of the program and commitment to its implementation. The program allows young people to learn how to practice setting boundaries with friends, classmates and others in their lives. They can then draw upon these skills when feeling threatened by another peer or adult.

The Diocese of Richmond is doing everything in its power to prevent the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by clergy, religious or lay Church personnel and we continue to be transparent and accountable regarding past allegations of sexual abuse.

Our victim assistance outreach has helped us to better understand victims' pain and has allowed us to identify ways to rebuild trust. We will continue to provide victim survivors and their families the pastoral support, counseling, financial and practical assistance they need on their journey toward healing.

The Office of Safe Environment is proactive in identifying and preventing potential unsafe situations. We continue to be in compliance with the USCCB Charter audit. Revision of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* is under consideration. In November 2021, the Body of Bishops overwhelmingly approved a review of the Charter. We are honored that Bishop Knestout's brother bishops voted him to be Chairman-elect of the USCCB Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People. He will be heavily involved with and take the lead in the revision of the Charter.

We remain focused on our ministry and follow our Shepherd as he leads us.

Nazia Shafi, Director  
Office of Safe Environment

— St. Teresa of Avila

### Farewell to Maryjane Fuller

This year we bid goodbye to Maryjane Fuller, former diocesan director of both the Office of Human Resources and Safe Environment, who passed away on October 19, 2022.

Maryjane joined the diocese in January 2005 where she was instrumental in developing the Office of Safe Environment. During her time in the diocese, Maryjane facilitated over 300 VIRTUS-Protecting God's Children for Adults training sessions and trained many facilitators. We are grateful for the work she performed for the diocese and the many lives she touched.



## VICTIM ASSISTANCE OUTREACH

### Diocesan Review Board

We take every allegation of child sexual abuse seriously and work closely with our Diocesan Review Board which assists Bishop Knestout in examining and assessing each allegation.

During this annual report period, the Diocesan

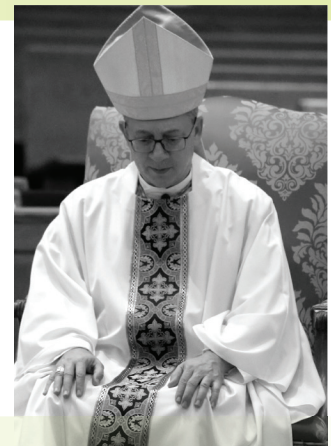
Review Board assessed 20 allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, religious or lay personnel of the Diocese of Richmond. Of these 20 allegations, 17 were allegations of past abuse brought forward through the Independent Reconciliation Program (IRP) in 2020. One allegation from the past, however, came from outside of the IRP. Two were more recent allegations, one of which was made against a lay Church volunteer. The determinations were as follows:

- 14 allegations were found credible
- 5 allegations, two being the more recent allegations, were found not credible
  - 1 of these allegations was made against a Church volunteer
- 1 allegation from the past was found inconclusive; there was not enough information to make a determination

### Mass for Hope & Healing

As part of his outreach to and support for victim survivors of sexual abuse and their families, Bishop Knestout celebrated a Mass for Hope and Healing at St. Bede Catholic Church, Williamsburg, on October 6. Many faithful gathered to pray with the bishop for victim survivors and their families, and to renew their

own commitment to support survivors on their journeys toward healing and wholeness. Bishop Knestout is committed to celebrating a Mass for Hope and Healing next year, and every year thereafter.



### Support Group Meetings

The Office of Safe Environment continued its outreach to survivors of child sexual abuse who were victimized by clergy, religious or lay Church personnel from the Diocese of Richmond. These in-person support group sessions were held bi-monthly in the Eastern Vicariate in the summer and were led by an independent facilitator. Spouses and affected community members were also welcome to attend. The venue changed to a virtual setting in the fall, to accommodate survivors living outside of this region. These gatherings offered a safe environment for participants to connect, share experiences, support each other on their healing journeys.

### Synod on Synodality

In March, victim survivors of clergy abuse participated in a listening session to provide local input for the World Synod of Bishops. This diocesan outreach gave voice to the pain experienced by victim-survivors. It allowed them an avenue to advise the diocese of their needs and offer ways to better minister to them. Mistakes made by the Church in the past were discussed, in addition to discussions of reporting processes to local authorities being inadequate. Their victimization experiences highlighted a lack of trust in the institutions of the Church, and the need for the Church to continue its efforts for full transparency and accountability. These survivors were hopeful to have their concerns acknowledged and documented in our Synod process. The full report is available at [www.richmonddiocese.org](http://www.richmonddiocese.org)

## AT-A-GLANCE

### Bishop Knestout, Chairman-Elect, Committee on Protection of Children and Young People



On November 15, 2022, at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) fall meeting, Bishop Knestout was voted by his brother bishops to be chairman for the USCCB Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People.

Bishop Knestout will begin serving as chairman of the committee in November, 2023. We continue to keep Bishop Knestout in our prayers as he fulfills this new role in protecting God's children.

### VIRTUS - Compliance Report



In our ongoing efforts to ensure employees and volunteers are in compliance with the Office of Safe Environment requirements of the diocese, we have worked with VIRTUS to enable staff who have local administrator rights on VIRTUS the ability to generate a Compliance Report for their location.

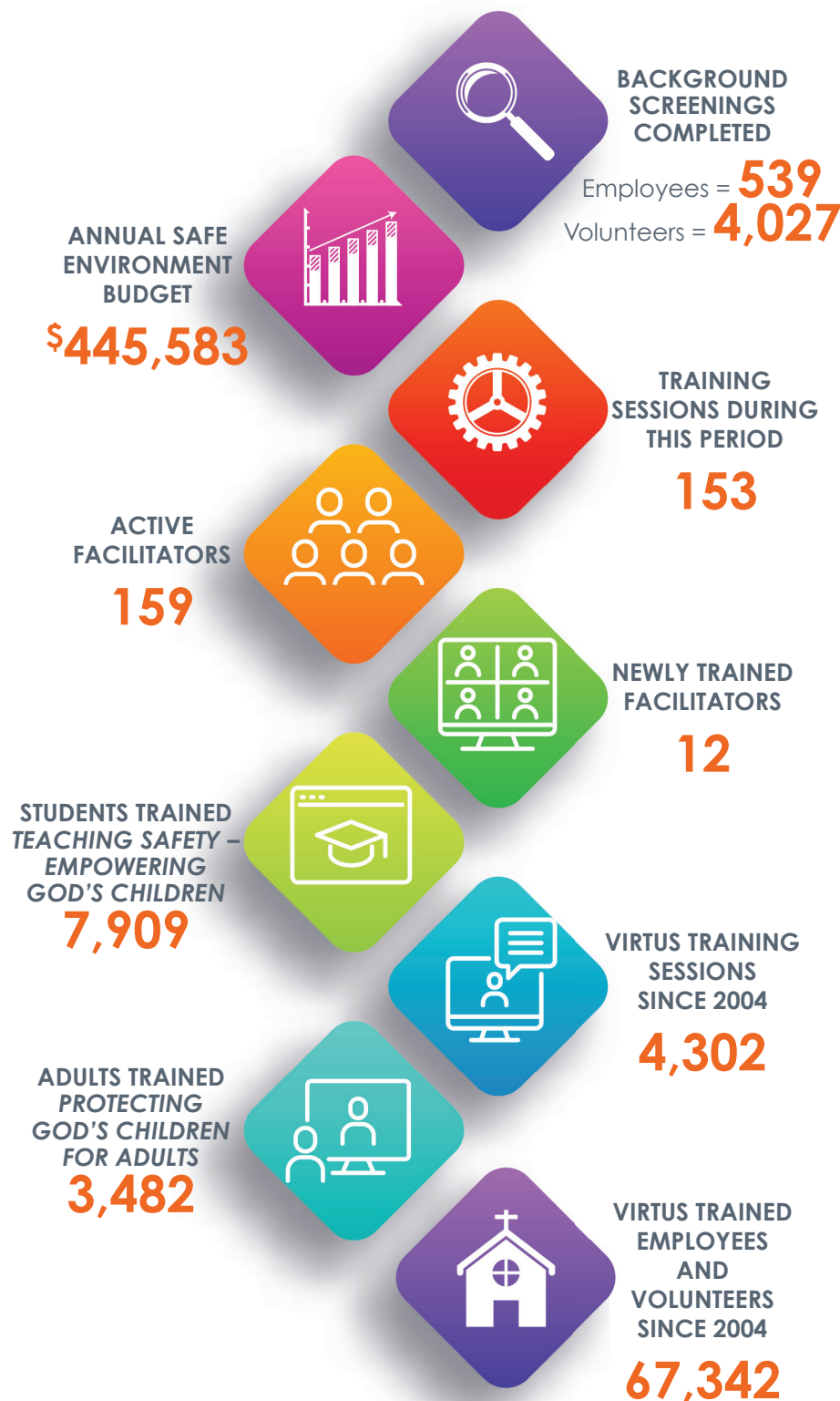
The Compliance Report provides a comprehensive view of which individuals are in compliance or not — for background checks, VIRTUS training, reading monthly VIRTUS bulletins and required diocesan policies.

Our Safe Environment background screening and training requirements are in accord with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, Articles 12 & 13.

### USCCB Audit



The diocese successfully completed the 2021/2022 Data Collection Audit. We remain in compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.





## SAFE ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES

### Teaching Safety-Empowering God's Children Training Program

In September 2022, the *Teaching Safety-Empowering God's Children* training program was initiated in our parishes. The program has been developed by VIRTUS and is currently being used in our Catholic elementary, middle, and high schools to assist children and youth in understanding personal boundaries and how to better protect themselves when faced with difficult situations.

The Office of Safe Environment remains proactive in ensuring the safety of children and youth, in preventing child sexual abuse, and in allowing



children and young people a safe space in which to grow and develop to their full potential. This program offers tools that children need to identify and overcome the advances of a person who intends to do them harm, helping them to protect themselves. For more information visit the diocesan website.

### Child Abuse Prevention Month

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established April as "Child Abuse Prevention Month." April gives us the opportunity to recommit ourselves to the ongoing child protection and safe environment efforts occurring every day in our parishes and schools across the diocese. We unite in prayer for the eradication of child abuse in all its heinous forms. We ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to intercede for us in prayer, asking God to bestow his graces upon children and families.

This year we partnered with Family Lifeline and their *Growing Well* programming. Family Lifeline is one of the oldest non-profit organizations in Virginia and an integral member of the greater Richmond community. They have been supporting stronger lives and stronger communities since 1877. Their *Growing Well* programming provides intensive home visitation services to support expecting families and families parenting young children. Pastoral Center staff supported their mission of strengthening young families by donating diapers, pull-ups, wipes and books.

On April 6, Bishop Knestout recited the rosary for the protection of children and families from the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Richmond. A livestream broadcast was

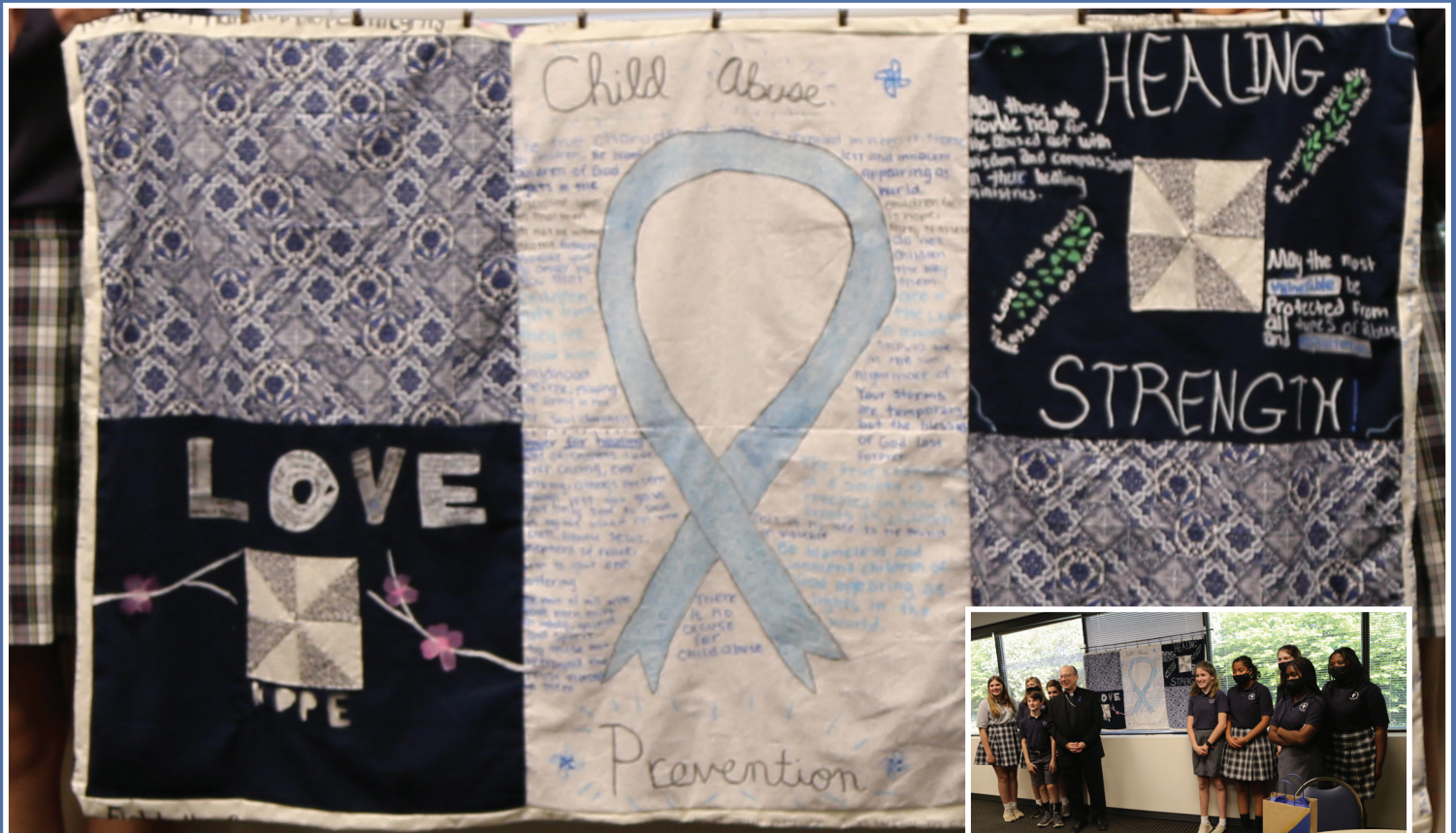


available on the Diocese of Richmond's digital platforms.

On April 27, a panel discussion on "Human Trafficking of Minors" was held at the Pastoral Center. Information was provided to increase awareness of trafficking and offer current means of prevention, both locally and nationwide. Attendees were alerted to the fact that social media has become a huge tool for traffickers to find and target victims, specifically minors, whose numbers reach 2 million across the globe. The event was coordinated by Phil Kamper, VCU student. The panel members were: Michael Feinmel, Deputy, Commonwealth's Attorney, Joseph Wechsler, Detective, Henrico County, FBI Richmond Regional Human Trafficking Task Force, and Alexandria Wall, Human Trafficking Program Manager, Safe Harbor.



## CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH 2022



On April 8, Bishop Knestout gave a reflection and blessing to all Pastoral Center staff. He extended his blessing to visiting students and teachers from our local Catholic schools. Students from Our Lady of Lourdes School created a beautiful hand-sewn quilt with biblical quotes and personal reflections. The St. Mary's School choir performed a heartwarming medley of sacred songs. St. Bridget's Middle School students wrote and recited personal prayers and reflections for victims of child abuse. All the students were recognized for their contributions by Bishop Knestout and the Office of Safe Environment.





## Reporting Information

The Diocese of Richmond encourages individuals who have been sexually abused by a priest, deacon, religious, lay employee or volunteer of the Diocese to report abuse directly to law enforcement, including Child Protective Services (CPS) at 1-800-552-7096 and the Victim Assistance Reporting line at 1-877-887-9603.

## Office of Safe Environment



## Contact Information

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