



July 20, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jesus says: "Let the little children come to me" (Matthew 19:14). As Catholics, we share a sacred obligation to protect the children, youth and vulnerable adults in our community.

In the Diocese of Helena our Safe Environment program and victim assistance ministry has been in place since 1993, 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, trainings and practices for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults. This formal decree is effective August 1, 2021, and the current policy remains in effect.

Our Safe Environment policies are found in a single document 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 Montana.

The Safe Environment Policy is available online at <https://diocesehelena.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Sexual-Conduct-Policy-2015.pdf>

Our goal is to reinforce the Diocese of Helena'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 Civil authorities and to the Diocese.

The re-promulgation of the Safe Environment Program includes the following initiatives, which augment the comprehensive outreach we have in place:

- Monthly continuing education on a variety of topics related to safe environment issues including the safe use of technology. This monthly education continues to be online and is required of all clergy, religious, employees and those volunteers who have scheduled contact with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
- Renewal of criminal and other appropriate background checks every (3) years, beginning in the fall of 2021.

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

Diocese of Helena • P.O. Box 1729 • Helena, MT 59624

Phone: 406.442.5820 • Fax: 406.442.5191

- Reissuance by June 30, 2022 of the Safe Environment Policy, which continues to serve as an implementation guide with updates to our Sexual Misconduct Policy and Code of Conduct on the safe use of technology and mandated reporting of suspected child abuse and child pornography. All adults who work or volunteer in any capacity in the Diocese of Helena must review the Policy. The Policy Receipt form must be re-signed whenever a person changes role, assignment or location within the Diocese.
- Beginning July 1, 2021, the Diocese requires each pastor, annually, to acknowledge either by email or letter that the safe environment program curricula and materials has been implemented in their parish and missions. The same requirement will exist for school administrators
- Distribution of new Safe Environment posters that are available in parishes on warning signs of abuse and reporting procedures. [Note that the most recent posters were distributed in spring of 2021.]
- Continuation of the diocesan Sexual Misconduct Review Board to include regular meetings, revised term limits and frequent policy review.

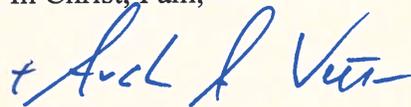
In the Diocese of Helena we continue to use the VIRTUS®, Protecting God's Children program to educate adults about the warning signs of sexual abuse and safe boundaries that all adults must adhere to when working with minors and vulnerable adults. VIRTUS will continue to be the initial training program 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 Helena receive annual Safe Environment training utilizing the Teaching Safety – Empowering God's Children program. Parents with children enrolled in religious education are encouraged to attend Safe Environment training to supplement the Empowering God's Children Curriculum that their child receives in our parishes and schools

Our goal is to create a Safe Environment for our children, youth, and vulnerable adults which we believe will significantly reduce the chances that the early warning signs of abuse will go unnoticed or unreported (even though we realize that unfortunately we may not be able to prevent every incident of abuse from occurring in the future).

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.

In Christ, I am,



Most Reverend Austin A. Vetter
Bishop of Helena