



The Archdiocese of Galveston - Houston

Memo: Safe Environment Education for Children and Young People in Grades K-12

To: Parents

From: The Archdiocesan Offices of Continuing Christian Education, Youth Ministry, and Safe Environment

The purpose of this memo is to introduce to you, as parents, a new Archdiocesan safe environment program called *Sacred & Safe*, for all children in Kindergarten-12th grades. The primary objective of the program is to assist you in protecting your child from sexual abuse.

As a parent, you have been entrusted by God with the care and responsibility to communicate to your child that he/she is loved. The foundation of this love is grounded in the establishment of a safe and secure environment in which your child can grow, develop, and love. As much as a parent might wish that he/she could protect one's child from every form of injury or hurt, one realizes that this is not possible. The Christian community by way of its baptismal responsibility is called to assist parents in this endeavor through Christian formation and familial support. In this light, the Catholic Church has developed an intentional plan to protect children and young people from sexual abuse. In 2002, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) established a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People with the intent that no child should ever experience the trauma of sexual abuse. As part of its charter, it established a directive to dioceses to engage the Christian community in responding to this objective. It reads:

ARTICLE 12. Dioceses/eparchies are to maintain "safe environment" programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people.

In response to this directive by the U.S. Bishops, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston established in 2003 a mandatory safe environment education program, called VIRTUS, for all adults who have regular contact with children in parish/school events and for all who are engaged in ministry. Its primary intent has been to inform adults engaged in ministry with children regarding the following areas in the prevention of child sexual abuse:

- Signs an adult may see in a child who is abused
- Signs an adult may see in a person who abuses children
- What actions an adult should take when they believe child abuse of any kind may be occurring
- The laws and policies regarding the reporting of child abuse

In addition to the VIRTUS' program, changes have been made in Archdiocesan and parish procedures to establish conditions for a safer environment for children and young people. Underlying this approach has been a guiding vision that it is the responsibility of the entire community to establish and maintain a safe environment. Through a process of ongoing safe environment education and vigilance, parish communities can maintain a concerted effort in the prevention of child sexual abuse. In a continuing effort to enhance this plan, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, under the direction of Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, is instituting an educational program, *Sacred & Safe*, which includes the formation of all children in parishes from kindergarten through the 12th grade. Its primary focus is to help children and their parents develop the knowledge and skills needed to keep children and young people safe and protected from sexual abuse. *Sacred & Safe* is an ongoing program which will annually provide one age appropriate lesson to children along with a parent resource to reinforce the lesson.

The Archdiocese is grateful for your support in this effort to help ensure the well-being of your child.