



Protecting God's Children with VIRTUS

In June 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The Charter calls every diocese to establish safe environment programs "...to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people." Each diocese is also expected "...to make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust, with regard to children."

In accord with the *Charter*, the Diocese of New Ulm has conducted a safe environment program over the past five years. Michelle Flood was appointed in 2005 as the New Ulm Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator. She has been working diligently over the past several months preparing to introduce a new safe environment program called VIRTUS, "Protecting God's Children."

The VIRTUS program identifies best practices designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote "rightdoing" within religious organizations. VIRTUS empowers organizations and people to better protect children and youth, and to improve the lives of all those who interact with the Church.

"VIRTUS is a good fit for our diocese," said Flood. "It has an online component that replaces the safe environment program format (speakers and DVDs) required in the past. Response from participants in the new program has been very favorable."

The Diocese of New Ulm has policies and procedures in place to make it difficult for a perpetrator to harm children in the diocese. Those working and volunteering with children and youth complete an application process that includes background checks. Ongoing supervision and education is required. In the coming months, new policies and procedures, and updated Web pages will be available on the diocesan Web site at www.dnu.org.

While there has been some concern and confusion expressed concerning the previous diocesan safe environment programs, the VIRTUS program addresses these issues. "By having a diocesan wide program, facilitated by trained individuals, the training will be consistent no matter where you attend a session," Flood commented.

To help with the safe environment training, Flood has the assistance of twelve facilitators who have attended three days of training in the diocese. Together, they will train the 4,000 individuals in the Diocese of New Ulm who are required by the *Charter* to attend. Pastoral leaders and principals of the diocese attended the

VIRTUS introductory session this summer.

All employees in the Diocese of New Ulm, as well as volunteers who work unsupervised with minors, are required to attend a VIRTUS "Protecting God's Children" training session. Parents and other interested parishioners are also welcome to attend at any scheduled site.

"The nice thing about VIRTUS is that the introductory session is attended only once. After that, follow-up training for employees and volunteers is done online annually, quarterly, or monthly depending on one's status which will be determined VIRTUS procedures," Flood stated.

Flood understands that it may be inconvenient for some people to attend a VIRTUS session, but believes that everyone is willing to devote some extra time to help create safer environments for children, and noted that participants have so far shown great interest and expressed gratitude following each session. "In fact, many have suggested that every parent should participate," added Flood.

Most U. S. Catholics Are Unaware of the Church's Efforts to Prevent Abuse

According to a recent national survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, <http://cara.georgetown.edu/>, only one-third of Catholics are aware of the U.S. bishops' policies to prevent child sex abuse and to effectively respond to abuse allegations. Only one-sixth are aware of the abuse prevention (safe environment) programs in their own dioceses.

According to the survey, less than half of Catholics are aware of key policies and procedures mandated by the bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, adopted five years ago. The majority are not aware that:

- allegations of abuse involving anyone who is a minor are reported to public authorities and dioceses cooperate with investigations;
- anyone credibly accused of abusing a minor is removed from ministry;
- dioceses reach out to victims and their families and offer counseling and spiritual assistance;
- dioceses conduct background checks on clergy and other paid personnel and volunteers whose duties include unsupervised contact with minors;
- the incidence of abuse of minors by priests has declined dramatically since 1985.

VIRTUS Sessions Planned

All employees in the Diocese of New Ulm, as well as volunteers who work unsupervised with minors, are required to attend a VIRTUS "Protecting God's Children" training session. Parents and other interested parishioners are also welcome to attend at any scheduled site listed below. Call your local parish/school office with any questions about attendance requirements.

Note: It is not necessary to RSVP or pre-register.

2007 VIRTUS Session Schedule:

- Sept. 5th at 6:30 p.m. in Morgan - St. Michael
- Sept. 5th at 6:30 p.m. in Minneota - St. Edward
- Sept. 6th at 6:30 p.m. in Benson - St. Francis
- Sept. 9th at 12:30 p.m. in Glencoe - St. Pius X (*Spanish only*)
- Sept. 12th at 6:30 p.m. in Fairfax - St. Andrew School
- Sept. 13th at 6:30 p.m. in North Mankato - Holy Rosary
- Sept. 15th at 9:30 a.m. New Ulm - St. Anthony Elem. School
- Sept. 15th at 9:30 a.m. in Willmar - St. Mary
- Sept. 16th at 1:30 p.m. Litchfield - St. Philip (*Spanish only*)
- Sept. 18th at 6:30 p.m. in New Ulm - St. Mary
- Sept. 19th at 6:30 p.m. in Montevideo - St. Joseph
- Sept. 20th at 6:30 p.m. in Ivanhoe - Ss. Peter and Paul
- Sept. 22nd at 9:30 a.m. in Ortonville - St. John
- Sept. 23rd at 12:30 p.m. in Canby - St. Peter
- Sept. 25th at 3:30 p.m. in Hutchinson - St. Anastasia
- Sept. 26th at 6:30 p.m. in Spicer - Our Lady of the Lakes
- Sept. 27th at 6:30 p.m. in Tracy - St. Mary
- Sept. 29th at 9:30 a.m. in Winsted - Holy Trinity
- Oct. 7th at 1:00 p.m. in Redwood Falls - St. Catherine
- Oct. 8th at 6:30 p.m. in Wabasso - St. Anne
- Oct. 10th at 6:30 p.m. in Sleepy Eye - St. Mary
- Oct. 11th at 3:30 p.m. in Springfield - St. Raphael
- Oct. 13th at 9:30 a.m. in Watkins - St. Anthony
- Oct. 23rd at 3:30 p.m. in Bird Island - St. Mary
- Oct. 25th at 6:30 p.m. in Glencoe - St. Pius X
- Oct. 27th at 9:30 a.m. in St. Peter - St. Peter
- Oct. 29th at 7:00 p.m. in Litchfield - St. Philip