



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

December 1, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

As I near my one year anniversary of service to you the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, I wish to report how we as a diocese continue to fulfill our obligations and responsibilities to safeguard children and young people from the danger of sexual abuse by clerics and others within the Church.

Reports of child sexual abuse committed by members of the clergy have declined since 2002, when the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. Nonetheless, we remain vigilant in protecting children and young people. Pastors in each of the 133 parishes that comprise our diocese are committed to the Safe Environment requirements of the Charter.

Employees and volunteers are required to attend Virtus® Protecting God's Children training which makes participants aware of the signs of child sexual abuse, the methods and means by which offenders commit abuse and steps one can use to prevent child sexual abuse. Employees and volunteers also receive Codes of Conduct and undergo background screenings. These requirements form the foundation of our diocesan safe environment program.

Offered daily throughout the diocese, the Virtus training program remains our standard for safe environment training. To date 102,500 volunteers and employees have participated in a Virtus class since its inception in 2003. During 2017, 487 Virtus classes were offered with over 6,000 people in attendance.

In 2017, the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People, under the direction of Mary McMahon, has implemented several initiatives adding another layer in our effort to create safe environments. The office is working to bring Virtus training to the Spanish speaking populations of the diocese. At present, we have trained 35 Spanish speaking Virtus facilitators, thereby allowing Virtus classes to be offered in Spanish throughout the diocese. The office has also partnered with our Spanish language newspaper, *Fe Fuerza Vida* to contribute articles on child protection. The office has also initiated meetings for Spanish speaking clergy to reinforce the Safe Environment requirements.

Since the release of standards by the USCCB in 2002, the diocese has been audited by an outside agency to determine adherence to national policies. In each audit the diocese has been found to be in full compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. In December 2017, our child protection efforts will again undergo an audit. I am confident that we will, once again be found to be in compliance with the Charter.

The Office for the Protection of Children and Young People has also been working with the Office of Human Resources to establish a rescreening regimen requiring each of our employees and volunteers to be re-screened at five-year intervals. To date, I can report that all clergy (Bishops, priests and deacons) and employees have been rescreened. Rescreening of volunteers is underway in several parishes and will continue to be rolled-out until every parish in the diocese has been updated. Additionally, international clergy who assist during summer months and visiting clergy who remain in the diocese for any length of time are subject to international background screening.

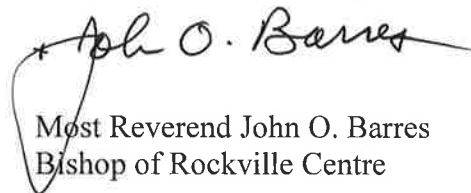
Considering programs for our youth, we are making the Virtus training program available to youth between the ages of 15-18 with a signed parental permission slip. Young people today have easy access to explicit information, which in many cases, is beyond their years and maturity level. By offering Virtus to this youthful population, it is our hope they will be empowered in their choices in both real time and cyber-time. Without exception when teens attend Virtus, the common denominator in every discussion is: "My friends need to see this program!"

Our Diocesan Hotline (516-594-9063) is available for anyone to report abuse by a member of the clergy. All calls remain anonymous and are returned within twenty-four hours by a licensed mental health professional. The diocese cooperates with local and state officials in reporting all allegations of abuse and encourages and supports all reporters of abuse to do the same. We remain steadfast in our commitment to offer counseling and spiritual assistance to survivors of abuse.

To survivors and family members impacted by clergy sexual abuse, it is my sincere hope that you find the strength to return to us. As I listen to the stories of survivors, I am saddened by accounts of the deep divide the abuse has caused in individual lives of faith. I have also heard of resilience, of strength and tremendous courage as survivors, working with professionals, struggle to heal the wounds of abuse. We, the Church, ask for your forgiveness and assure you not only of our commitment to support your ongoing healing but also of a warm and genuine invitation to come back when you are ready. I continue to offer my prayers for your peace and for your healing.

During this season of Advent, as we await God's gift to us in his Savior, please join me in prayer to our mother Mary, the Mother of our Church and may God bless you all and thank you for the inspirational way you live our Church's Mission of Mercy each day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre