



Diocese of Grand Rapids & Holy Family Parish Protecting God's Children ~ An Empowering Opportunity



“VIRTUS - Protecting God's Children” Required* Diocesan Training

Why?

Safeguarding children from abuse is one of the most important activities of the Church. The Diocese of Grand Rapids is implementing a nationally recognized program of preventing child sexual abuse as part of its commitment to and compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*. In 2003, these U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops documents became effective for all dioceses in the United States.

What?

The program being implemented is “VIRTUS – Protecting God's Children”. This awareness session will train all diocesan clergy, employees and volunteers who regularly interact with children and young people. VIRTUS – Protecting God's Children is intended to help participants sharpen their eyes and ears to better identify problems that could put children at risk. VIRTUS – Protecting God's Children implements safety mechanisms that send a message to all abusers and potential abusers that:

- Child abuse is not tolerated.
 - Children are vigilantly protected.
 - Victims are listened to, heard and shielded from further abuse.
 - Offenders are identified and punished.
- For those already participating in this training, a sense of empowerment and healing has come in knowing that children are being protected by the safety net created by our parish community.

Who must attend?

All adults who regularly interact with children and young people in our parish, and those designated by their parish administration must attend. (This includes CFF catechists, aides & helpers; Youth Ministry program adults; Children's Word catechists & helpers; Nursery workers; Clown Ministry adults; Children's & Middle School Choir adults; Knights of Columbus Squires adults; adult Ushers; all parish paid staff; parish Stephen Ministers; Play Group Ministry adults, Children's Initiation adults, and any other ministry or activity that causes adults to interact with minors.) The presentation is intended for mature audiences only - persons under 18 years of age should not attend.

When & Where?

Dates and locations are frequently being added to the schedule. For an up-to-date listing, go to www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org, click on Child and Youth Protection, Protecting God's Children Awareness Sessions, and then Schedule. If you do not have internet access, contact the parish office for upcoming dates.

What if I can't attend?

All parish ministers working with young people must be trained in order to begin or continue their ministry with young people. If unable to attend the training at Holy Family you will need to attend a session at another parish as listed above.

How do I register?

Pre-registration is required. A workbook is required in order to attend an Awareness Session. In order to receive a workbook, each participant must pre-register at the VIRTUS® Online website. Go to <http://www.virtusonline.org>, click “Registration” (in yellow type on left side of web page), and follow the instructions. Be sure to make a note of your user id and password. If you need assistance or do not have internet access or an email address, contact the parish or CFF office. There is no registration fee; this training is covered by our CSA contributions.

Information continues on reverse



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Who else is invited to attend?

All other parishioners and community members who are interested in protecting children and young people and creating a safe environment for them. This may include parents, grandparents, school volunteers, professionals in fields interacting with minors (teachers, librarians, school administrators, coaches, social workers, nurses, doctors, counselors, etc.). The success of protecting our children is based on the more community members who are aware, the safer are our children.

Will there be childcare?

Childcare will NOT be available due to the duration and time of the session and our past experience; it is unfair to children to be in childcare at the church for that period of time at that time of evening.

What about supper?

Supper is on your own. Light refreshments will be available during the training.

What about continuing education?

Repetition and reinforcement is needed to ensure something taught is retained and utilized. Thus, an important component of the PGC program is to provide accessible and effective continuing education. Some individuals -because of the nature and level of their work- will be required to complete online continuing education. That is, after they attend an Awareness Session, and they receive notice of their approval, they will go to the VIRTUS website where they will be directed to read an article. Each article will expand on the principles learned in the Awareness Session. A log of continuing education progress will be maintained for each of these individuals in the online database available through VIRTUS. Those who will be asked to participate in online continuing education have jobs that require them to oversee or supervise programs or ministries that involve children or young people. These classifications will receive an email informing them that they must participate in the online continuing education. This participation will be recorded and used in the next National Task Force audit of Diocesan compliance.

Be aware.

A “*Protecting God's Children*” Awareness Session is emotionally powerful, and may be overwhelming for individuals particularly sensitive to the matter of sexual abuse. The presentation includes explicit and frank discussion of sexual abuse by victims and perpetrators. Please call Fr. Dave, Nol Michels, Dick Wachter or Chris Shafer at the parish office to request to be excused if you believe the subject matter will be distressing or offensive.