

## Protecting God's Children—What We Are All About

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We who are in the business of preventing child sexual abuse are so immersed in the subject that we may forget the great impact this horror has on people. We have heard firsthand from victims, worked with perpetrators and garnered all that we could from professionals in the field. These professionals provide us with information so that we can help others to prevent other children from being victimized. In order to accomplish this work, we train as many people as we can to bring the program to every corner of the Church in the United States and beyond.

Our goal has always been to train as many people as possible in the Protecting God's Children® program so that we may empower them with knowledge and awareness. This effort was begun in a large way in 2002 and has spread across the country and beyond to all those who commit themselves to the cause of protecting children. In a big way, our prayers have been answered. VIRTUS® has been part of the culture of the Church for several years now. People know that when you belong to a parish community or other church-affiliated institution that you are required to attend a safe environment program. You cannot teach religious education, work in a Catholic school or volunteer as a minister in any capacity when you come in regular contact with children without being trained to know what child sexual abuse is and what efforts are available to you to prevent it in your own families and community.

The video portion, which has recently been re-designed and updated, is the third version since the initial development in 1998. The core message remains the same, but the video presentations are fresh and new, incorporating a contemporary look and delivering the information in a way that is not distracting to the audience. Getting bogged down with dated surroundings and out-of-date fashions, etc., is an easy way to slide into denial. The portrayal of victims and abusers is vivid and to many hard to accept and absorb. Some members of the audience find it difficult to believe the truth that child sexual abuse is as prevalent as it is today. In an almost unconscious way, they tend to dwell on the parts of our video presentation that appear debatable. Are the victims real? Are the perpetrators real? Are the statistics accurate? Do victims really have life-long difficulties? Isn't this just another cover-up for the Church? And on and on. Some have brought up the most minute details with, perhaps, the hope that if one thing is incorrect in the program, all of it is. Unfortunately, they are mistaken. The content of the video is true. Children are sexually molested and face a life that is filled with challenges. That is why we are here. To stop this as best we can and to prevent it from happening not only to those we love, but also to those members of our society who are forgotten, alone and vulnerable.

We understand all of these challenges and that is why the program is structured in the way that it is so that feedback and discussion are an integral part of the process. In a large way, the process becomes the content. How people are able to verbalize their thoughts and feelings about the difficult subject content becomes healing, helpful and empowering to others.

We are grateful that you have partnered in this ministry with us—without the efforts of thousands of arch/diocesan facilitators across the country and the participants who attend the sessions and those who bring forth this message, we are lost. We need your help to do the following, which will make our work even more productive and effective. Won't you please consider going these few extra steps with us?

1. Please Pray: For the success of the program, for the hearts of those hardened to this issue that they might be softened. For victims and for all vulnerable persons. For those who promote and facilitate the program and for those who participate in it.

2. Please Promote Awareness: That the Protecting God's Children program exists and all who would like to participate in our church communities are invited. To your family and friends and neighbors—so they hear the good news and can be encouraged by our message.

3. Please Be Sensitive: To victims. Members of our great Body of Christ in and through all of our Church communities have suffered abuse in all of its many ugly forms: child sexual abuse; neglect; emotional and physical abuse; date rape; and abandonment. Please be mindful that when you ask people to take part in the program, you let them know what it is about. Participating in the program is not a punishment. It is not just another hoop to jump through to become a volunteer minister. It is an opportunity to save children and vulnerable adults from abuse. Please advertise that the program deals with the nature of child sexual abuse and portrays victims and perpetrators. Please inform your parish and school secretaries that those they ask to attend should be invited and informed about the program they will participate in. People should be respected so that they are not shocked and re-traumatized when they show up for the presentation. Being sensitive to this simply means making people aware.

Thanks, and ever thanks, for all you do to Protect God's Children.

*Brought to you through the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. and its VIRTUS® programs with the goal to help prevent, address, and mitigate wrongdoing in the community of faith and to help adults become protectors of children and to help communities become safe havens for children.*