Diocese of Brownsville † Protecting the People of God

As the Catholic faithful of the Valley, we share responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. Each of us is called to celebrate, promote, and when necessary to defend the life and dignity of every person. This awesome responsibility demands that we treat everyone with respect, do what we can to see that harm is never brought to others, especially minors and vulnerable adults, and seek to bring healing for those who have been harmed.

To help achieve these ends, the Diocese of Brownsville has taken the following steps:

- Appointed an Assistance Coordinator to offer immediate assistance to victims.
- Adopted new ***Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines for Ethical and Responsible Conduct in Ministry***
- Introduced a nationally recognized safe environment program of education and prevention of child sexual abuse called ***Protecting God's Children*** from ***VIRTUS***.
- Established a policy requiring criminal background checks of all clergy and religious, of all church employees, and of all volunteers who have regular contact with minors or vulnerable adults.

An audit conducted by the Stonebridge Group showed that the diocese was in full compliance with the ***Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People***.

The diocese also participated in a study commissioned by the U.S. Bishops and conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. This study, was released in 2010, was made to determine the nature and scope of the problem of sexual abuse of children and young people by clergy within the Church in the United States. The diocese hopes that the knowledge gained from the study will lead to a better understanding of the root causes of the problem of sexual abuse of minors, and identify any further action to prevent recurrence.

Ensuring a safe environment for children and young people is a progressive process, and the diocese will continually work towards identifying areas where it can be more effective.

How to Report Suspected Misconduct

Suspected misconduct with minors by lay church personnel should be reported to the pastor of the parish, the principal of the school, or the head of the Catholic institution in question.

Suspected misconduct with minors by a priest, deacon, or religious should be reported directly to the Bishop at (956) 542-2501 or Vicar General at (956) 784-5010; to Margie Garcia, Victims Assistance Coordinator, at (956) 238-1455; or to Sr. Norma Pimentel, Director of Social Services, at (956) 702-4088.

Letters to the Bishop or Vicar General should be sent to P.O. Box 2279, Brownsville, TX 78522-2279. Upon request, a form for a ***Confidential Notice of Concern*** may be obtained from the local pastor, school principal, institution head, or diocese, or it may be downloaded from the Diocese of Brownsville's website (www.cdob.org).

By state law, anyone who suspects abuse or neglect of a minor must report it to local law enforcement officials or to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) at 1-800-252-5400.

Reaching Out to Victims

Our prayers remain with all victims and their families. As we move forward in doing everything we can to ensure a safe environment for children and young people, we encourage individuals who may have been victims to come forward and contact the Church so that we may offer our assistance.

Bishop Daniel E. Flores is willing to meet with anyone who has been victimized. He may be reached at (956) 542-2501. He has also designated the following individuals as contacts:

- Bishop Mario A. Avilés, Vicar General, (956) 784-5010 or (956) 542-2501
- Mrs. Margie Garcia, Victims Assistance Coordinator, (956) 238-1455, Email: Margie.Garcia@cdob.org
- Sr. Norma Pimentel, Director of Social Services, (956) 702- 4088, Email: npimentel@cdob.org

Prayer for Victims *(Adapted from the Book of Blessings)*

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: You gave your only Son to save us by the blood of his cross. Relieve the pain of all who suffer from abuse and violence. Grant them peace of mind and a renewed faith in your protection and care. Protect us all from the violence of others, keep us safe from the weapons of hate, and restore to us tranquility and peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.