



Office of the Bishop

DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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DECREE OF CHANGES **TO** **DIOCESAN SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Our children and youth are our most precious gifts, for they truly are the future of our families, our communities, and our Church. As Bishop of the Diocese of Little Rock, I am ultimately responsible for overseeing and ensuring proper implementation of our Diocesan Safe Environment Program, which seeks to create and maintain safe environments for all of our children and youth.

Over the past several months, we have been in the process of re-evaluating our Safe Environment policies and procedures, with the goal of enhancing and improving our Safe Environment Program—and, ultimately, protecting our children and youth as best we can. After much prayer and deliberation, I have decided to make some changes to our policies and procedures, and our Safe Environment Office has been working hard to make these new changes a reality.

The following changes will take effect on **March 1, 2016**:

I. On-Line VIRTUS Training (English and Spanish)

The initial VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children for Adults* training will now be available on-line via smartphone, laptop, desktop computer and tablet. The on-line training is available in both English and Spanish.

Live, in-person training will still be offered as an option, but those offerings will be based on interest and need.

II. On-Line Background Checks (English and Spanish)

People will no longer fill out and sign the “Screening Release Forms” and send to the Diocese for processing of background checks. Rather, *all persons* will now be required to: (i) create a VIRTUS account on-line, and (ii) input their own background check information on-line in conjunction with the VIRTUS system. All of this information will be available in both English and Spanish.

The Diocese will still receive the results of the background checks, but it will no longer be responsible for receiving, processing, and inputting people’s personal data in order to run the background check. The motivation for this change is two-fold. First, it streamlines the process for inputting background check information, which will free up our Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator to do more substantive safe environment work and training by decreasing the amount of time spent on data entry. Second, it will help protect people’s personal and sensitive

data, as parishes will no longer be collecting this data and transmitting it to the Diocese, and the Diocese will no longer be receiving or storing this data on-site.

An added feature of the new background check company is automated quarterly re-checking of certain key databases, at no additional cost. The Diocese will receive notification only if there are any changes to those key databases.

For those who already have VIRTUS accounts: Those who already have VIRTUS accounts have already submitted background check information. Our practice has been to re-run the background checks every 5 years for two categories of persons: (i) Employees, and (ii) Volunteers with Regular Contact with Minors. “Employees” and “Volunteers with Minors” will not need to re-submit their background check information on-line at this time. Rather, the Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator will determine when those persons are due for their 5-year renewal, at which time those persons will be contacted and asked to input their background check information on-line through their VIRTUS account. Because the new company automatically updates those background checks on a quarterly basis, there will be no need for future 5-year renewals once your data is inputted with the new company.

III. All Must Create a VIRTUS Account

All employees and volunteers will be required to create a VIRTUS account. Not only will the background check information be integrated through VIRTUS accounts, but the VIRTUS database will be critical for distribution of the “continuing education” materials (see IV., below). In addition to the initial training and the on-line background check, the VIRTUS accounts will also be used to have people electronically read and acknowledge (i) the Laity Code of Conduct, and (ii) the Policy on Sexual Abuse of Minors. Those who already have a VIRTUS account will *not* have to create new accounts.

IV. No More Monthly VIRTUS Bulletins

A critical and required part of our Safe Environment Program is “continuing education.” Up to now, that continuing education has included mandatory monthly VIRTUS bulletins for employees and certain key volunteers.

Rather than continuing to require the monthly VIRTUS bulletins, the Safe Environment Office will be creating and distributing quarterly training newsletters in both English and Spanish, which parishes and schools can distribute as bulletin inserts, handouts, mailings, website postings, etc. These quarterly newsletters will also be e-mailed to everyone with a registered VIRTUS account. Look for the first quarterly newsletter in June 2016. Because these newsletters will be coming directly from our Safe Environment Office rather than through VIRTUS, the Diocese will not be “tracking” the reading of these newsletters.

In addition to the quarterly newsletters, the Safe Environment Office will begin to conduct in-service training sessions for groups that already hold continuing education or formation events, such as clergy, religious, educators, youth ministers, and catechists.

For those who appreciate the content of the VIRTUS monthly bulletins, don't worry! That or similar content will still be incorporated into the Diocese's quarterly newsletters.

Conclusion

Change can be difficult, and I know that many in our parishes and schools have grown accustomed to the system that was in place previously. However, I do believe that these changes are for the best—not only for our Diocese and our Safe Environment Program, but also (and most importantly) for our children and youth whom we aim to protect and keep safe. It is my fervent hope that these changes will only enhance the wonderful work that is already being done each and every day in the area of Safe Environment.

GIVEN at the Chancery, Diocese of Little Rock, on February 5, 2016, Memorial of Saint Agatha.



The Most Reverend Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock



Matthew A. Glover, J.D., J.C.L.
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