



# DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

## Diocese of St. Augustine Safe Environment Program

The Diocese of St. Augustine has had a safe environment program in place since 1998 and has continually improved the program. I take this opportunity to re-promulgate and reiterate as official diocesan policy our current safe environment program. This letter supersedes my previous letter dated June 30, 2021.

The safe environment program contains all of the elements that are required by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the essential norms deriving from the Charter's latest revision in 2018. The essential norms, having received the *recognition* of the Holy See, is particular law in the dioceses of the United States. In addition to children and youth, all dioceses in the Province of Miami also apply the protections of the Charter and Norms to vulnerable adults as defined in Florida Law.

More specifically, the diocesan safe environment program consists of the following components:

- Background screening requirements for clergy, religious, lay employees, educators, and covered volunteers: here, I want to emphasize that background screening must be cleared ***before*** the person assumes his or her position or begins volunteer service; there can be no compromises or exceptions regarding this aspect of the Safe Environment Program.
- The *Protecting God's Children 4.0* program is designed to educate clergy, religious, employees, educators, and volunteers in ways and means to establish and maintain a safe environment for children and youth. A 30-day compliance window to complete PGC is allowed from the date of background screening clearance.
- *Circle of Grace* ©Archdiocese of Omaha provides educational tools for children to protect themselves and has been implemented in all diocesan schools and parish religious education programs. *Healthy Relationships for Teens 2.0*, trademarked by VIRTUS, is designed to help high school youth cooperate in maintaining their own personal safety. It is of vital importance that every child and youth in our Catholic schools, parish religious education, and youth programs be given the opportunity to take part in this critical element of our safe environment program. ***Here again, there can be no compromise.***
- Beginning in July 2022, the diocese will implement continuing education using a VIRTUS online training module titled *A Plan to Protect God's Children 4.0*. Online training will be required every five years on the date of fingerprint clearance renewal.

All the components listed above ensure that our diocesan program is in full compliance with the requirements of the USCCB's Office for the Protection of Children and Young People. I direct that they continue to be fully implemented in each parish, school, and agency of this diocese.

Finally, my staff will continue to evaluate all the components of the safe environment program annually, and whenever necessary, make appropriate adjustments or improvements to remain always in alignment with societal changes.

Thank you for your cooperation in this most important area of concern for our entire diocese.

Sincerely yours,

+ v. r. Estévez

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, STD

Apostolic Administrator

Catholic Center • 11625 Old St. Augustine Road • Jacksonville, Florida • 32258-2060  
Phone: 904-262-3200 • Fax 904-260-8736 • Email: bishopsoffice@dosaf.com

July 1, 2022