



All Pastors  
All Principals  
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Greetings and peace to all of you as a new academic year begins.

As you know from past years, our diocese cooperates with the USCCB Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Young People. Through this cover-letter I am mandating that these standards outlined by the U. S. Bishops be applied throughout the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings. Therefore, all employees, volunteers, religious and clergy receive appropriate safe-environment training, observe appropriate codes of conduct, and pass background checks.

Why the mandate? There are several reasons. First, providing what truly is a safe environment is important for the wellbeing of children. While occasions of sexual abuse inflicted on children by those who minister to them is relatively infrequent, experience confirms that individuals with a predilection to abuse children can find their way into a situation in which they hurt children. Second, there are situations in which a minister may be falsely accused of sexually abusing a child. A safe environment not only protects children but also protects those who minister to them. Thirdly, data is now beginning to come forward demonstrating that children who receive training know better how to resist unwanted advances or, at least, come forward immediately when they experience a form of molestation. Fourth, most sexual abuse of children occurs in contexts that do not involve church activities. Given the significantly high level of incidences of sexual abuse in society against children, the Church is doing a great service to children and families in the sense that they know better how to resist and report sexual abuse. The bottom line is "better safe than sorry." Our children simply are too precious.

In addition, we make programming available to parents, and use other diocesan resources, such as the monthly general mailing and *The Harvest* to comply with the Charter and Norms.

Finally, the Charter and Norms address programming for children. The material contained in the enclosed packet clarifies how this is accomplished at both the parish and school level. All the tools necessary for implementation are included. I request that you respond to this effort in a timely fashion. Thanking you in advance for your cooperation as we strive to comply with the Charter collectively.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Michael W. Warfel  
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings

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