

## Communications Policy of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings is committed to the mandates, norms and intent of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. In 1995 Bishop Anthony Milone approved the promulgation of the diocesan Sexual Ethics Policy. In 1997 Bishop Milone approved and promulgated a diocesan Student Sexual Harassment Policy. Both policies are available on the diocesan website. The diocesan Communications Policy is one that reflects these policies and is designed to enact Article 7 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* which states:

“Each diocese/eparchy will develop a communications policy that reflects a commitment to transparency and openness. Within the confines of respect for privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved, dioceses/eparchies will deal as openly as possible with members of the community. This is especially so with regard to assisting and supporting parish communities directly affected by ministerial misconduct involving minors.”

### Concern for Victims

Pastoral outreach to the victims and those affected in the faith communities is critical. Pastoral concern for the reputation of the good name of priests and laity is also critical. Reaching out to the victims is crucial in all that is done.

A complaint form for allegations is available to parishes, missions, volunteers, staff members, parishioners and all others who need it. It is available on the diocesan website and at the diocesan Pastoral Center, as well as in parishes. It is published in *The Harvest* (see Appendix 1).

The safe environment called for by the *Charter* is established throughout the Diocese by means of the VIRTUS Program. Training sessions and information about the program are available on-line. Awareness of the program is published and promulgated through *The Harvest*, General Mailings, the Diocesan website, and special mailings.

Awareness of services provided to victims is available from the Victim's Assistance Coordinator. The Vicar General oversees publicizing available services on the diocesan website, in the General Mailing, *The Harvest*, parish bulletins and special mailings.

When appropriate, the Vicar General, with approval of the Bishop, and in collaboration with the Victim's Assistance Coordinator, prepares a statement for presentation to the affected parish community expressing support for the victims and those in need of healing. The Vicar General

presents the statement at a designated gathering. The statement addresses the services of healing and reconciliation that will be made available, as well as other supportive services that the

community has need of. These services might be healing and prayer experiences, liturgies, and awareness of counseling and other support services.

### **Communication**

The Diocese strongly encourages people to report allegations of sexual abuse and/or harassment to the Vicar General or to the Diocesan Superintendent of Schools. The allegations will be conveyed promptly to the Diocesan Response Team and the Victim's Assistance Coordinator. Confidentiality and concern for the well-being of all parties involved will be honored.

Ordinarily the Vicar General serves as the official spokesperson for the Diocese. He initiates secular press releases. The Bishop may delegate this role if extraordinary circumstances arise. The Vicar General, with approval of the Bishop, oversees the following publications: *The Harvest*, General Mailing, and the diocesan website.

The Bishop reserves the right to agree to interviews and serve as spokesperson in situations requiring his presence. The Bishop grants radio, television and press interviews when appropriate.

### **Pastoral Care**

In all areas of communication, concern for the victims, healing for those affected and the well-being and reputation of all involved is conducted with Christian pastoral sensitivity and care. The Communications Policy adheres to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, Essential Norms*, the diocesan Sexual Ethics Policy, and other relevant programs, services, and documents.

**Promulgated by**

**Most Rev. Anthony M. Milone  
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings**