

Diocesan Policy Implementation Plan

The **first phase** of implementation of the USCCB Charter and Norms was completed July 31, 2003. Bishop Milone mandated background checks for all priests and deacons with faculties of the diocese, seminarians, paid parish staff members, contracted service staff and school employees who have regular contact with children.

A cover letter from Bishop Milone was distributed as well as a letter from the Diocesan Attorney, Greg Hatley, (which clarified the necessity of such background checks). The diocese chose to utilize the services of a company called “Mind Your Business, Inc.” which supplied not only the Release Form, but also a list of “Frequently Asked Questions” – with answers that were very helpful in explaining the process as well as the costs for the background checks.

Another item that was distributed at that time was the first version of our Pastoral Code of Conduct. All of the parties listed above were to return the signature page for the Code of Conduct and the Release Form.

The first round of gathering and organizing data began. Parishes and schools were instructed that from now on, new employees should not be offered a firm offer of employment until the results of the background checks are available for the decision to hire.

In August of 2003, there was a special supplement to *The Harvest*, the diocesan newspaper, giving general information about the Charter and Norms, introducing the Victim Assistance Coordinator, the Independent Review Board and the Promoter of Justice, and a statistical summary of the incidents of abuse of young people in our diocese.

The **second phase** of implementation of the Charter and Norms was completed October 1, 2003. It was aimed at volunteers in our parishes and schools.

Pastors, Pastoral Administrators, and School Principals were asked to explain to all volunteers who work with children the necessity of the background checks and the Code of Conduct. Materials for distribution were sent to the parishes, schools and all youth-related organizations, so that the returned forms could be gathered and organized by the Chancery. “Mind Your Business, Inc.” supplied another list of “Frequently Asked Questions” to address additional issues surrounding background checks.

Also during this time, the diocese had contracted the service of VIRTUS[®] to begin safe environments training. The first facilitator session was held in Lewistown in December 2003.

Programming for children and youth was also implemented in 2003. For younger children, many parishes used “For Pete’s Sake” and “Speak Up, Say No” from Oblate Media. Other parishes developed their own programming, and some relied on the awareness training held at public school. Programming is also available for junior and senior high school students through the diocesan Office of Youth Ministry and Catechesis. If parents so wish, they have an opportunity to have their children “opt out” of the programs.

Parents also have access to awareness training; they are invited to come to the VIRTUS® training sessions and the Chancery makes monthly material available for distribution to parishioners.

At this time, all clergy and parish and school employees and volunteers have been instructed to have a completed background check, a signed Code of Conduct, and safe environments training through VIRTUS®. Children regularly are exposed to safe environment training, and parents are regularly informed either on-line or through parish handouts.