



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

February 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

With the adoption of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (2002)*, the Bishops of the United States established standards of safety to be implemented in every diocese in the United States. As directed by the Charter, each diocese was to establish policies and procedures to insure that the tragedy of child sexual abuse by members of the clergy would never occur again. The Diocese of Rockville Centre, in response to *The Charter*, published The Diocesan Child Protection Policy which outlines policies and procedures the Diocese has in place to assist survivors of clergy sexual abuse, to educate the faithful in creating safe environments and ensure the accountability of our policies and procedures. Copies of this document are available in parish offices and on-line. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this document. I also want to assure you of my unwavering commitment to protect our youth and vulnerable members of our parish communities.

*The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (The Charter- Article 12)* requires that parishes provide safe environment training to all volunteers and employees and that each parish is able to certify that individuals have received the appropriate training. To fulfill this requirement the Diocese requires that all employees and volunteers attend the Virtus Program: *Protecting God's Children*. By attending a Virtus class, participants learn to identify signs of 'grooming behavior' and are offered a plan to maintain environments around children that are safe.

*The Charter (Article 13)* directs each diocese to evaluate the background of all incardinated and nonincardinated priests and deacons, as well as all diocesan parish and school employees and volunteers. In response to this directive the Diocese of Rockville Centre requires background screening of all employees and volunteers. The safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults demands that we are conscientious in follow-through with this directive. In 2016, the Diocese initiated a five-year rescreening policy requiring all those in active ministry be rescreened at five-year intervals.

*The Charter (Article 12)* requires safe environment education for youth. New York State curriculum covers this requirement. However, in consultation with The Office for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Office of Faith Formation, I fully supported the initiative to introduce a safe environment program to children attending our Faith Formation programs. In 2018, we introduced the program, *Think First and Stay Safe: Child Lures Prevention*. Each year, this one-hour class is taught to children attending parish Faith Formation programs in grades 1-6. The goal of this program is to help children recognize potentially risky situations and when to seek help. In our Catholic schools topics related to personal safety, healthy choices, morality and human dignity are integrated into the curriculum beginning with kindergarten and continuing through twelfth grade. Special emphasis is placed on the dignity of the body, on the sanctity of life and sustaining a life impacted by Church teachings.

In May 2019, our Holy Father, Pope Francis issued new procedural norms for addressing and preventing sexual abuse entitled “*Vos estis lux mundi*”. These norms specifically hold bishops and religious superiors accountable for their own behaviors and leadership. The Diocese of Rockville Centre works with our Metropolitan Archdiocese of New York to ensure that these directives are followed.

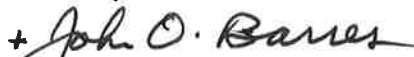
The Office for the Protection of Children and Young People (OFPCYP) participates in an annual audit conducted by an independent auditing team, StoneBridge Partners. During the audit the Diocese provides information related to each parish including Virtus attendance, background screening, and compliance with all the Charter mandates. The Diocese has participated annually in the audit process beginning in 2002 and has been found to be in compliance with The Charter every year. I remain firm in my commitment to maintain our excellent standards.

Finally, I want to thank you the faithful, for your participation in and support of all our safe environment endeavors. I know that on a daily basis you, along with the faithful priests and deacons in the Diocese, minister to those most in need and most vulnerable. Thank you for creating safe places that those who approach you may do so without fear. Thank you for all you do for the Church, your parish, and for your support of *dramatic missionary growth*.

I assure you of my prayers, my support and unwavering commitment to uphold the mandates of The Charter.

Please pray with me for all those who have been harmed in any way by members of the Church. Let us pray for their healing and peace.

Sincerely in Christ,

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Most Reverend John O. Barres  
Bishop of Rockville Centre