



Thursday, 8 August 2014

My Dear Faithful in Christ,

“Here, then, is the message we heard from Him [Christ] and announce to you: that God is light; and in him there is no darkness . . . if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another . . .” (1 John 1:5-7).

Ensuring the safety of our children is a challenging undertaking. In this effort, the Church relies on the collaboration of parents and competent educators. The role of catechists and teachers is to assist the work of the parents. For the past 10 years, the Archdiocese of Atlanta has brought into the light this important issue which is often shrouded in darkness by conducting Safe Environment training within our Catholic Schools and Parish Religious Education programs using a self-produced program - YOU MATTER. This year, we are switching to a widely-used, comprehensive and continually updated program produced by VIRTUS - *Protecting God's Children*. This program is currently being used in half the dioceses across our country and we have found that it amply meets the many and varied needs of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

The VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children* programs were developed consistent with the guidelines established by the Church as proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*). *Protecting God's Children* assumes that the primary education of children is in the hands of the parents and that carefully planned classroom instruction will reinforce what parents have taught their children at home. Through these programs, teachers, catechists, and youth ministers work in concert with parents in assuring that all of God's children have the tools they need to be safe and to resist the overtures of anyone who might seek to hurt them.

Teaching children to protect themselves is part of the mandate of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002. Article 12 of the Charter states:

*Dioceses/eparchies will establish "safe environment" programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children.*

The VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children* programs are vehicles available to parents and the Church to assist in accomplishing this important mission. Please join me in my support of the VIRTUS Safe Environment Program and together we can all continue to rise to the challenge of keeping our children as safe as possible.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Wilton D. Gregory,  
Archbishop of Atlanta

Archdiocese of Atlanta

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