



## DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Bishop Kevin Vann on the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People  
April 7, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Diocese of Fort Worth,

I have met so many of you personally over my nearly six years here, in many places and ways, but especially through your ministry and dedication to “Called to Protect: Keeping Children Safe.” I am so grateful for the efforts you have made in our Diocese to help prevent child abuse, and to ensure the safety of our parishes and schools. I appreciate the efforts that many of you have made to direct inquiries to either me or to Judy Locke, the director of Victims Assistance Ministry in this most important time in the life of the Church. April 2011 marks the start of National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Our Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection, in conjunction with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, will be placing materials on the diocesan website and making resources available to help raise awareness and increase our knowledge of effective and helpful ways to prevent child sexual abuse. I hope that you take advantage of these resources.

Since I was appointed as Bishop in 2005, I have been committed to upholding the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Charter for Protection of Children and Young People*. Because so many individuals in our Diocese, including priests, religious, deacons, diocesan staff, employees and volunteers in parish and school ministries have made a commitment to uphold the *Charter*, our Diocese has passed each annual audit carried out by an independent firm retained by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The words of the Lord are indeed direct and severe. In St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 25, the Lord Jesus Himself in his commission to the Disciples says that when they show mercy and compassion to the least ones, they show it to Him. We know, as well, that Jesus extended his care in a special way to children, when He said to the apostles “Let the children come to me.” This reading, St. Matthew Chapter 19, is familiar to many of us since it is often proclaimed during the Rite of Baptism for Children. Another passage from St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 18, has a very clear and direct warning for anyone who would lead the little ones astray. These words of the Lord are associated with scandal, and the consequences for those who do this are indeed severe: A millstone will be hung around their necks, and they will be cast into the sea.

The subject of the *Charter* has been on the agenda of each national and local meeting of Bishops I have attended. I am committed to upholding the Articles of the *Charter*, which require me to be clear and forthright with all—clergy, religious, lay ministers, employees and volunteers—who are such an integral part of the life of our Diocese. This clarity certainly extends, as well, to every Catholic in the 28-county area of our Diocese. Because of this commitment, I have announced publicly any semblance of truth to allegations of sexual abuse of a minor when it is established. This practice will continue.

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In the six years that I have served our Diocese, I have removed from ministry one priest against whom semblance of truth to allegations of sexual abuse of a minor were made and who made an admission. In addition, in that same time frame, two lay diocesan employees were removed for a semblance of truth to allegations of sexual abuse of minors. Sadly, I have been and continue to be personally involved in a number of settlements of cases involving sexual abuse of minors by clergy. These instances of abuse occurred prior to my arrival in our Diocese.

The sexual abuse of minors is a crime and a sin. Clergy sexual abuse of minors is especially disheartening and tragic. It results in damage to victims' faith, their relationships, the well-being of families, and the public at large. And, it affects our ability to minister and proclaim the Gospel in the way that we should. Knowing what we as clergy are called to do, and given the trust that people put in us, I am angered, discouraged and embarrassed that people have been abused by clergy and those entrusted to minister in the Church. I have personally apologized whenever possible, in the name of the Church, to those who have been affected by this tragedy, and will continue to do so. In 2009, we observed a day of prayer and reparation for victims of abuse by celebrating a Mass for Healing at St. Patrick's Cathedral. On that day we prayed for forgiveness, justice, and healing for all victims, their families, and communities. These needs continue to be part of my prayer, and I know they are part of yours prayers as well.

Recent national news reports describe allegations of mishandling of reports of sexual misconduct involving minors and priests have become a renewed cause of concern. I believe these allegations have cast a "cloud" over the hard work, good efforts and ministry of all involved in the implementation and ongoing work of the *Charter* in our country since 2002. I join Archbishop Timothy Dolan and the USCCB Administrative Committee in their recent reassurance that the Catholic Bishops are resolved to deal firmly with sexual abuse of minors by clergy and other church personnel who commit this.

Archbishop Dolan, in his recent letter after the Administrative Committee meeting said, [We wish to reiterate that] "this painful issue [of sexual abuse] continues to receive our careful attention, that the protection of our children and young people is of the highest priority, and that the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* that we adopted in 2002 remains strongly in place." You can find the full text of Archbishop Dolan's text at the diocesan website, [www.fwdiocese.org](http://www.fwdiocese.org).

I wish to clearly state again that we have been, and will continue to be, vigilant here in our Diocese about the ongoing monitoring of the *Charter* and the accompanying *Essential Norms*. This tragedy and evil cannot be a part of the life of our local Church. We continue to be affected and suffer because of the occurrence of this in the past. Any allegation that is brought to our attention will be directly and thoroughly dealt with, in keeping with the *Charter* and its *Essential Norms*.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has planned an in-depth review of the *Charter* for our June 2011 meeting. At that time the Bishops also will be receiving the final report of the John Jay College of

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Criminal Justice at City University of New York on the “Causes and Context” of sexual abuse of minors. Earlier reports from the John Jay College on clergy sexual abuse of minors can be found on the USCCB website, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

We must remain vigilant in our promotion of a culture of safety wherever and whenever we minister, not only during Child Abuse Prevention Month but during the entire year. I want to thank all who are involved as coordinators and trainers of our diocesan Safe Environment Program. Their work to protect our children and youth is a gift to the Church. At the heart of our Catholic Faith is the understanding that each and every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and is therefore worthy of our respect, regard, and protection. This has been a part of our teaching, but especially is to be part of the life and ministry of all who teach and proclaim the Gospel. Our children and young people deserve no less, and the life of the Body of Christ is ever stronger for it.

The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth asks that anyone who has either witnessed or has suffered sexual abuse by anyone who serves the Church to come forward so that the individual and the Church can continue the healing process. To report abuse to the civil authorities, call the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (Child Protective Services) at 1-800-252-5400. To report abuse to the Diocese of Fort Worth call Judy Locke, the Victim Assistance Coordinator, at 817-560-2452, ext. 201 or e-mail her at [jlocke@fwdioc.org](mailto:jlocke@fwdioc.org). Persons also can call the sexual abuse hotline, 817-560-2452, ext. 900. Or call The Catholic Center 817-560-2452, ext. 102 and ask for the Vicar General, Father Stephen Berg.

Thank you especially to the priests, consecrated religious and deacons for the witness of their lives and ministry in these days, and all involved in lay ministry in our parishes, institutions, ecclesial movements and programs in the life of the Church. Your witness is a blessing to countless people here in North Texas.

Thank you for the living out of our Faith in our Diocese which is growing and becoming an ever brighter witness to the presence of the Lord here in North Texas. Thank you for all that you do in so many evident and unseen ways each and every day. I pray that these Lenten days will be a time of grace, conversion, and blessing for you and your families, and the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord will be a time in which the words of the Risen Lord “Peace be with you” will find a place in all of our lives.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Kevin Vann, JCD, DD

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