

# Safe Environment Program

*"As disciples of Christ and as his servants in ministry, our basic call is to holiness which expresses itself in living a good, moral life, based on love and respect for one another. . . A primary concern of all will be to provide a safe, secure, and sacred environment for all, especially children and young people."* [Excerpt from a letter in the Diocesan Policy on Ethics and Integrity in Ministry by Most Rev. Michael D. Pfeifer, OMI, Bishop of San Angelo]

In an effort to provide a safe environment for children and young people, the Diocese of San Angelo has implemented a Safe Environment Program that educates on three levels.

1. An **Ethics and Integrity in Ministry Workshop** for all clergy, religious, and employees, as well as volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
  - a. This mandatory workshop is an extensive review of the diocesan Ethics Policy as well as a training on recognizing and reporting Child Sexual Abuse. These workshops are presented at various times and locations throughout the three deaneries of the diocese (San Angelo, Abilene, and Midland/Odessa areas). Upon completion of the workshop each attendee reads and signs the Diocesan Code of Ethics .
  - b. As of December 1, 2004 over 4,000 people have attended this workshop. Anyone is welcome to attend this workshop. For information on dates and locations of the workshop, please go to our home page and click on the link for "Ethics and Integrity in Ministry Workshop Dates".
  - c. In addition to the Ethics and Integrity Workshop, all clergy, religious, and employees, as well as volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must successfully pass a criminal records background investigation.
2. **Preventing Child Sexual Abuse**, a workshop for parents, to make them aware of the scope of the problem of child sexual abuse, and ways that they can protect their children from becoming victims of this crime. This workshop is open to anyone who are interested in attending and is presented by the individual parishes. Please contact your pastor for additional information on dates and times for this workshop.
3. **Empower: The School-Parent Partnership for Child Safety**, a grade appropriate curriculum, for grades K through 12 to make children and youth aware of the problem and to empower them to protect themselves from becoming victims of sexual abuse. As of September 1, 2004, over 12,600 children and youth in the diocese have attended this training.

It is important that we support prevention programs in our schools and parishes. While most of us will ensure that our children have the information they need to protect themselves, we know that many children who are being molested will not get such vital information from their parents. Hence, there is a need for publicly supported programs. However, we must be aware that whenever such a program is brought into a school or church curriculum, children will begin to make disclosures about abuse.

We must be ready to accept that children will disclose abuse by fathers, uncles, grandfathers, coaches, teachers, babysitters, and others trusted to care for them. We must be prepared to deal with this reality as a community and be ready for the emotional fallout from such an event.