

Why should we implement this prevention program?

EDITOR'S NOTE: *As you might expect, we've dealt with lots of questions, concerns, and general apprehension surrounding the issue of child sexual abuse. In the VIRTUS® programs' spirit of continuous improvement, we've focused this issue of COMMUNICARE® on the implementation of the Protecting God's Children™ program. The cover story (pages 1 and 4) discusses obstacles to implementing a sexual abuse prevention program. The inside story (pages 2 and 3) discusses some of the common questions and answers regarding the Protecting God's Children program. If you have additional questions or concerns—beyond those listed here—call the VIRTUS programs hotline at 1-888-847-8870.*

The ongoing national child sexual abuse scandal has everyone walking on eggshells. We all agree that child sexual abuse is unacceptable and that something needs to be done, and soon. We are cautious, for fear of doing anything to further harm abuse victims. Yet, we are faced with the Christian principle of balancing support and healing of the victims with forgiveness and treatment of the abusers. What can a diocese do? What can a parish do? What can a person do?

The answer and the first key to helping prevent child sexual abuse is that nobody can do everything.

No individual can take on all the responsibility for abuse prevention. And there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, it's one of our greatest strengths. Why? Because child sexual abuse is a societal issue—a problem that permeates every community. Hence, it requires a comprehensive, community response. The need for a community-wide response is one reason we developed the Protecting God's Children program with awareness components that reach out to everyone in a parish, the broader community, and into the world around us.

In a faith-based environment, this concept is designed to flourish. As Christians, we are familiar with some tried-and-true methods that have served us well for many years. By attending Sunday school and other religious education programs, we are exposed to God's word.

For each of us, our personal role as a witness for God speaks to the hearts and minds of those around us. In our fellowship with others, we share our Christian values through our words and our behavior. The Protecting God's Children program is based on many of these same methods that we already use as Christians.

The Protecting God's Children awareness sessions are designed to speak to a broad, public audience. Real awareness, however, begins with each of us, as individuals. As we become aware of the types of harm and suffering associated with child sexual abuse, we are inspired to take action. The program provides us with a set of simple, yet powerful tools—warning signs of abuse, characteristics of a potential perpetrator, steps parents can take to protect their children—

tools designed to help us, as individuals, become protectors of children. Through a simple, but focused implementation process, this outreach is provided to all adults in a parish community. The collective benefit is the nurturing of a community where abuse is not tolerated and children are safe.

So, implementation of this type of program really requires two things from each individual: 1) a commitment to the cause, and 2) a commitment of time to help with the cause. We

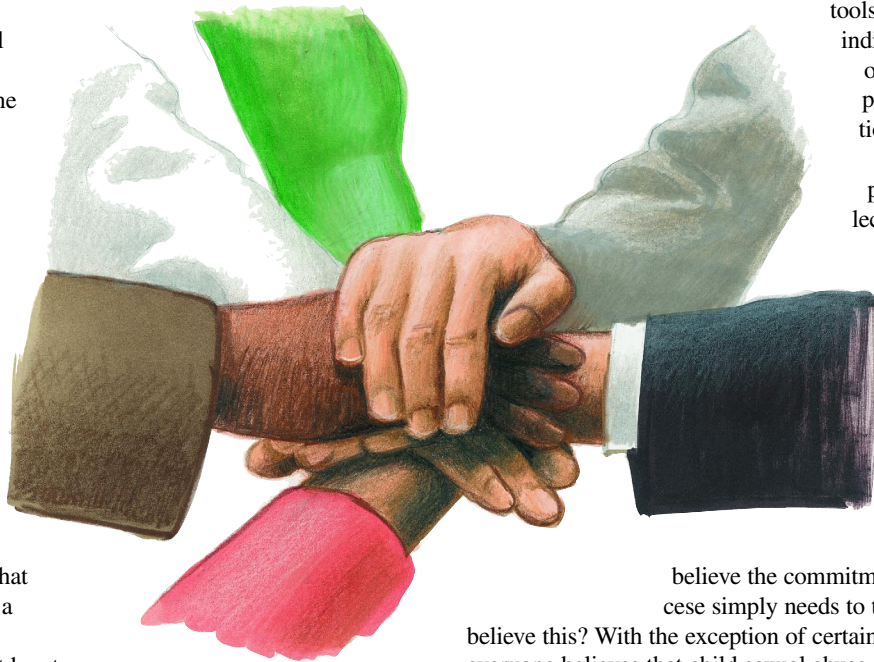
believe the commitment is already there—a diocese simply needs to tap into it. Why do we

believe this? With the exception of certain types of perpetrators, everyone believes that child sexual abuse is wrong and most people are committed to helping with this cause. What they need is guidance and tools. And, the Protecting God's Children program provides those assets.

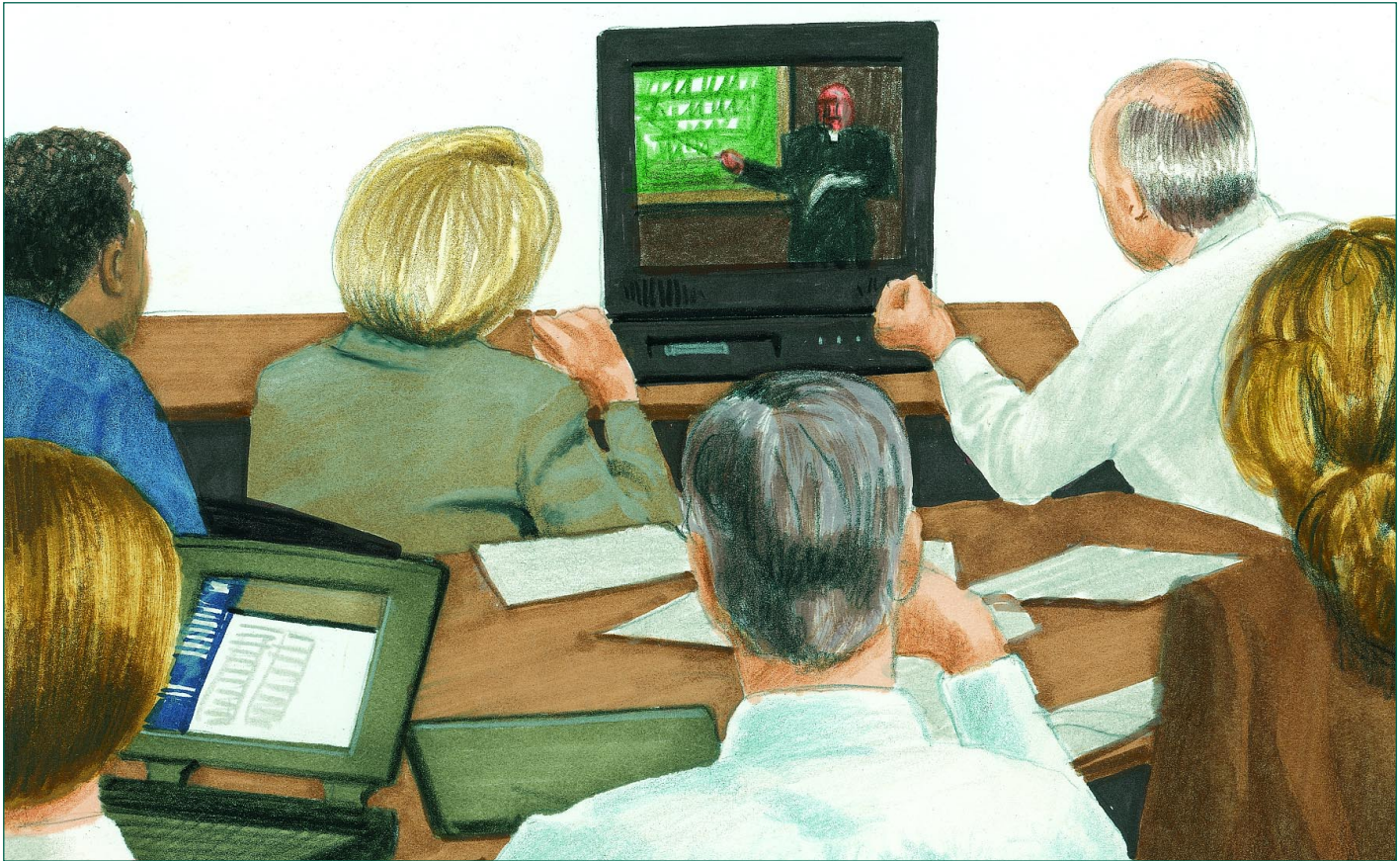
The VIRTUS programs provide the expertise to help your organization get its implementation process off the ground. We train your program facilitators to provide guidance for your clergy, staff, volunteers, and other parishioners through "awareness" sessions. Plus, there's ongoing web-based training for key staff members and volunteers—to provide them with the tools necessary to get the program "up and running" and to maintain it at a successful level. So, the Protecting God's Children program helps a diocese to tap into the existing community-wide commitment to prevent child sexual abuse.

This brings us to the issue of time. Everyone is busy within the

continued on page 4



Answering some common implementation questions: *How can a diocese reach the entire faith community in a timely manner?*



Throughout the process of developing the VIRTUS® programs, we've repeated our commitment to continuous improvement. Continuous improvement applies to all aspects of the programs, not the least of which is the implementation process.

With regard to implementation, continuous improvement involves working with dioceses and other organizations to implement the programs, then applying what we've learned—during that process—to help improve the process for the next implementation. This may sound a bit overwhelming, but really it is not. We simply keep our eyes and ears open, listen to your thoughts and concerns, ask additional questions, and strive each day to make the program better today than it was yesterday.

During 2002, we've focused a great deal of time and effort in helping dioceses implement the Protecting God's Children™ program. Since January, we've initiated the actual implementation process in 23 dioceses and further, have ongoing dialogue with 68 dioceses seeking information regarding implementation of Protecting God's

Children. Based on your feedback, concerns, and questions, we've identified a few commonly asked questions about implementing the program, and we've answered them based on our growing experience in this area.

Perhaps you already know the answers to these questions. If so, thanks for reading this far. If not, please continue and learn everything you can to help adults throughout your community become protectors of children and to help your diocese be a safe haven for children. And, either way, please email your questions to us for use at a future date.

Question #1—How do we get started?

First, if you are selected as the VIRTUS coordinator for your diocese or organization, we'll have two or three phone conversations with you to establish a game plan for when and where the implementation process will begin. Typically, we start by training the local VIRTUS coordinator on all aspects of the program. You'll go through every piece of the program, just like any other participant. Then, when

you're more familiar with the program and it's components, we'll guide you through the process of creating your own implementation plan. The following activities will generally be a part of your plan:

- Meet with key diocesan leaders to review the program, determine overall implementation needs, and discuss your strategy for marketing the program to parishioners throughout your diocese.
- Prepare an implementation schedule.
- Recruit well-suited individuals to become your local program facilitators (these are the people who present the adult awareness component of the program to groups of adults).
- Complete VIRTUS Online™ training and enter all of your diocese's specific information into the system.
- Prepare for and oversee a two-day session to train the local facilitators that you've recruited.

- Prepare for and oversee one or more one-day Protecting God's Children awareness sessions for adults.
- Enter data collected at the awareness session into the VIRTUS Online system.
- Oversee the activities of those who have trained to present the awareness session to adults throughout your diocese.
- Administer the use of the VIRTUS Online system in your diocese. This includes assigning user privileges on the VIRTUS Online system, notifying participants of their ongoing online training requirements, monitoring and tracking the training progress, and consulting with those who need assistance.
- Provide feedback to key diocesan leaders.

This process doesn't happen overnight. It takes several weeks to get started and several months to complete.

Question #2—How long are the training sessions?

The train-the-facilitator sessions take two days—approximately eight hours each day. The Protecting God's Children awareness session for adults (these are the sessions your local facilitators will lead) take approximately four hours to complete.

Question #3—How do we determine who is qualified to be a facilitator?

Here are some qualifications that make someone a good potential candidate: Someone from within your diocese who has previous experience as a trainer, facilitator, or frequent public speaker or is in a position where effective communication is important.

When seeking volunteers, keep in mind that educators, attorneys, and business people typically have the right kind of experience to be successful facilitators. Retired people with excellent communication and presentation skills are also good candidates. Individuals from Catholic Charities are also good potential candidates because of their likely history of involvement in child abuse counseling cases.

Before you begin training, make sure to fully disclose the position requirements to all potential facilitators. Candidates must also submit to a reference check and criminal background check.

Question #4—For the initial adult training session where the newly trained local facilitators observe an actual awareness session being conducted by a VIRTUS qualified trainer, how many additional people can we include, and who should we include?

If the facility is adequate, a Protecting God's Children awareness session for adults can accommodate up to 500 participants—with a VIRTUS trainer leading the session. We recommend that you select a particular leadership group as the primary audience at this initial session. Consider using this session to introduce the program to clergy, school administrators, etc.

For your local facilitators, we recommend a cap of 160 participants at a session. However, in all cases, a more manageable and effective session would have approximately 50 participants.

Question #5—When it comes time to begin offering the Protecting God's Children awareness sessions for adults, how do we determine who to start with?

As mentioned above, we recommend that you identify leadership groups as your initial audience. Many begin by providing the awareness session to clergy, school administrators, and other administrators and leaders employed by the diocese. Then, they expand down through the hierarchy providing the session to all employees and volunteers and, finally, to parishioners. Others hold "open" sessions, where leadership attends along with other employees and volunteers.

Question #6—What is VIRTUS Online?

VIRTUS Online is the brand name that identifies a state-of-the-art, web-based platform that provides best practices resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our system provides a comprehensive menu of functions for churches, religious organizations, and facilities from one convenient web-based resource. Through these functions we can help church organizations prevent wrongdoing, manage risk, and improve service to the community through education, training, and best practices. The home page, www.virtus.org, is provided free of charge to anyone in the world with access to the Internet. The subscriber pages (pages requesting a user name and a password) are intended for users from dioceses and organizations that subscribe to the VIRTUS programs.

Most training programs (seminars, instructor-led sessions, videos) establish awareness, but few change behavior. With the VIRTUS programs, the potential for successful behavioral change can be increased via our VIRTUS Online system. Every training program, in addition to instructor-led and video awareness sessions, provides ongoing web-based training. These regularly scheduled online bulletins and web-based training courses reinforce the knowledge points made during the awareness sessions. Moreover, every training program is tracked so the diocese or organization knows who has or has not trained. Plus, most of the online training bulletins and modules are interactive, allowing trainees to contact and interact with a trainer.

If you have questions ...

Periodically, we'll address common questions about the content and implementation of our programs. You may have a unique question about the Protecting God's Children program or one of the other VIRTUS programs. If so, please call the VIRTUS programs hotline at 1-888-847-8870

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continued from page 1

context of his or her own life. And, it takes time to implement prevention programs. But, no individual is required or expected to make a heroic time contribution. The real key to success is community involvement.

The Protecting God's Children program provides an opportunity for all adults in a community to participate in a comprehensive sexual abuse awareness session—a commitment of approximately four hours per individual. Not four hours per week. Not four hours per month. Just four hours. In that amount of time, an adult can learn about the types of harm associated with sexual abuse, can learn how to recognize the characteristics of a possible abuser, can become familiar with the warning signs of abuse, and can learn the proper way to report suspicious behavior. Four hours spent participating in an awareness session is a small time commitment for any adult—especially when the payoff is a lifetime of empowerment to help protect children.

Needless to say, program facilitators must make a greater commitment of time than the average parishioner—16 hours of intensive training, and approximately six hours of total time for each four-hour session that each facilitator hosts. But, an average-sized diocese doesn't need an army of facilitators to make an impact.

If, for example, a diocese can get 20 volunteers to become facilitators, and each facilitator conducts one (1) awareness session per month for a year to an average of 150 participants per session, that diocese can provide sexual abuse prevention tools to 36,000 people in a year. For some smaller dioceses, this may be a significant percentage of all the adults within the faith community.

As you can see, the Protecting God's Children program provides everything you need to:

- avoid being overwhelmed by dividing the implementation into manageable pieces and delegating those responsibilities appropriately;
- tap into the existing individual and community-wide commitment to prevent child sexual abuse; and
- point to the relatively small individual time commitment that's needed to empower each individual (and the entire group) to help prevent abuse.

Now that we've discussed the methodology for implementing a program, let's address the issue of cost, a factor that depends on a number of variables. Why? Because the Protecting God's Children program is flexible—enabling each diocese to customize the process according to specific local needs.

Generally speaking, an average-sized diocese can provide Protecting God's Children sexual abuse awareness sessions for many or most of its parishioners, and ongoing child sexual abuse prevention training to 2,000 clergy, staff, and key volunteers—all at a cost of less than purchasing a church vehicle, or repaving a parking lot. That's a small price for a diocese to pay to teach a quarter of a million people how to prevent, recognize and, when necessary, to report possible abuse—a very small price to teach individual adults to be protectors of children and to empower an entire diocese to be a safe haven for children.

If you have additional questions or concerns—beyond those listed here—please call the VIRTUS programs hotline at 1-888-847-8870.