

# Diocese of Rapid City

## Keeping God's Children Safe

*A Safe Faith Environment Newsletter*

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Please notice we are moving from a "Safe Environment" focus to a "Safe Faith Environment" focus. This article, written by Dr. Elizabeth Heidt Kozisek from the Diocese of Grand Island, explains the importance of this change. While the focus is on young people, the message applies to all those vulnerable at any stage of life. Our diocese continues the effort in maintaining a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults guided by the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Please share this information with other adults in your parish, so each of us can continue to be vigilant and responsible in keeping all the vulnerable safe as we each follow our Catholic Faith with the role model of Christ beside us.

### From Safe Environments to Faith Environments: Furthering the Gospel Message of Christ

Elizabeth A. Heidt Kozisek, Ph.D.  
Director – Child Protection Office  
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In his last formal address to the Victim Assistance Ministry Conference as chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee for Protection of Children and Youth, Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans called for a paradigm shift – "from Safe Environments to Faith Environments." A key point of his address was clear: Our efforts to right the wrong of sexual abuse and to protect the life and dignity of our children are not just about safety, but about our faith. All that we do as Church to respond to those suffering the pain of abuse; to protect children and youth; and to promote right relationships models the Gospel message of Christ.

#### Not our Compliance, but our Calling

Often when we hear about the efforts of the Church in regard to sexual abuse, we hear about the importance of compliance with the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. From a faith environment perspective, the importance is not in our compliance, but in our calling. As Catholics we are called to respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception to natural death. The *Charter* guides us in action to our calling. Our calling furthers the Gospel message of Christ.

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### Welcome to the first issue of our monthly newsletter

As a follow up on the recommendation made by the Charter Compliance auditors to send out regular communications to clergy, safe environment coordinators, employees and volunteers, this newsletter represents the first of a monthly communication.

The reason behind the recommendation is that since we are

now granting adult safe environment training certification that is good for five years, we need a formal way to update people on current matters involving safe environment.

Thank you for all that you have done to make the transition to the new program go smoothly. The ad hoc committee met on December 20 and discussed

feedback on program implementation. As a result of that session, we are considering some suggested changes, but they will not occur immediately and hopefully they will make life easier in the parishes. Parish Safe Environment Coordinators will have an opportunity to give input through a survey in the near future as part of this process as well.

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**USCCB Office of Child  
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about/child and youth  
protection/](http://www.usccb.org/about/child-and-youth-protection/)

**Diocese of Rapid City  
Safe Environment  
home page:**  
[www.rapidcitydiocese  
.org/WP/safe  
environment home](http://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/WP/safe-environment-home)

#### Ad Hoc Committee

##### Members:

Rev. Brian Christensen  
Rev. Bryan Sorensen  
Rev. Andrzej Wyrostek  
Mary Farrell  
Nancy Haugen  
Susan Safford  
Charlotte Verhey  
Margaret Simonson, Chair

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## **From Safe Environments to Faith Environments: Furthering the Gospel Message of Christ**

### **Not Retribution, but Reverence**

When we are bogged down with the requirements of a safe environment program or when we linger on the costs of healing and prevention efforts, we may be tempted to say, "That's not my problem, I didn't cause the abuse." From a faith perspective however, this is a matter of looking out for the need of others – their healing, safety, support and respect. As Christ said, "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you do for me."

### **Not Managing Risks, but Modeling Right Relationships**

Safe environment programs are more than "risk management," focusing on the actions to reduce the risk of abuse, to reduce further damage to our children and our Church. They involve modeling Christ, creating for children the kind of loving relationships that Christ teaches about in His gospel message. Every protective message to children, from noting their unique and special creation, their dignity as a person, and true meaning of love in relationships furthers the Gospel message of Christ.

### **Not merely Programs, Policies, and Procedures, but Who and How We Are**

As we move from the concept of safe environments to that of faith environments we realize that our efforts are more than a program with requirements to be checked off on a list. Healing those who have been harmed, preventing abuse, and modeling right relationships must be an inherent part of *who and how we are with children*. Matthew 18: 4-5 NAB, "And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

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### **A Prayer for Healing Victims of Abuse**

God of endless love,  
ever caring, ever strong,  
always present, always just:  
You gave your only Son  
to save us by the blood of his cross.  
Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,  
join to your own suffering  
the pain of all who have been hurt  
in body, mind, and spirit  
by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.  
Hear our cries as we agonize  
over the harm done to our brothers and sisters.  
Breathe wisdom into our prayers,  
soothe restless hearts with hope,  
steady shaken spirits with faith:  
Show us the way to justice and wholeness,  
enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.  
Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,  
heal your people's wounds  
and transform our brokenness.  
Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace,  
so that we may act with justice  
and find peace in you.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.