

## *A Message from the Bishop: Safe Environment Education for Children*

July 28, 2008

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Catechetical formation for young people from ages three to eighteen continues in parishes. Those who work and volunteer in catechetical programs are to be commended and have a special claim on our prayerful support as they are engaged in the Church's most important apostolate: to help others know, love, and serve Jesus.

Given the importance of this apostolate, it is vital that it be carried out by priests, religious, and lay persons who have the well-being of children and young people at heart. As with every other work of mercy, teaching others about Jesus and his Catholic Church is motivated first and foremost by love of neighbor.

As a testimony of this love and care, the following are required of every priest, religious, or lay person who works or volunteers in religious instruction and CYO programs in the Diocese of Wichita: (1) Submit to a background check; (2) Read and sign the Code of Ethical Standards; (3) Read and sign the Policy on Suspected Abuse of Children; (4) Complete the program for Virtus certification.

What does it mean to be Virtus certified? This is a guarantee that all priests, religious, and lay people who work or volunteer in a Church apostolate involving contact with children and young people have participated in a live training session about the sin and crime of child sexual abuse, as well as how they can help to prevent it and respond appropriately to it. The program also provides periodic bulletins for ongoing formation in these areas.

In addition, inspired by the same care for the well-being of children and young people, safe environment information is to be integrated into the religious education curriculum which includes grade specific, intergenerational, sacramental preparation and Totus Tuus. This information is not sex education; rather, it is an age-appropriate effort to help students to recognize when adults behave in an improper manner towards them, as well as how to defend themselves and report such behavior.

This is not an optional effort, no more than love of neighbor and care for the well-being of others is optional for a Christian. The motive behind this requirement is a love of neighbor that inspires a care for the well-being of children and young people. This is an enduring commitment until Jesus returns in glory.

With gratitude for those who collaborate in the mission of religious instruction and who are committed to keep children and young people safe from harm, with prayerful best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Michael O. Jackels  
Bishop of Wichita