

Continuous improvement in fighting child sexual abuse

When The National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. (National Catholic), developed the VIRTUS® programs, we were driven to achieve a few fundamental goals. First, we wanted practical programs that provide real, tangible value through simple steps that anyone could use. Next, we anticipated the need for flexibility, so we wanted to provide a strong, consistent framework that would allow individual dioceses and organizations to customize our programs to meet their unique, local needs. Third, we believe that each client is extremely important—hence, we expected to create a customer service environment that provides prompt, informative and friendly service to you, our shareholders and friends. And, finally, our prevailing motivation is to provide continuous improvement—incorporating your suggestions into our list of ongoing improvements to our programs.

Several archdioceses, dioceses, and other organizations across the country are now implementing our Protecting God's Children™ program and other components of the VIRTUS programs. To help us better manage our evolving programs, and to provide some internal accountability, we decided it was time to conduct an informal survey to make sure we're meeting our goals. We asked for feedback from those responsible for local implementation and thought you'd appreciate reading some of their responses.

The Diocese of Portland, Maine, is in the process of implementing all currently available core components of the Protecting God's Children program and the VIRTUS program. Portland has conducted initial train-the-trainer sessions, is finalizing revisions to policies and procedures, and is scheduling multiple training sessions to begin in the next few weeks—starting with additional local trainers and parochial school teachers, and extending shortly to adults throughout the diocese.

Paul Chamberlain, director of personnel and operations for the Diocese of Portland, is the point person for implementation.

Chamberlain said, "The most appealing aspect of the VIRTUS and Protecting God's Children programs is the proactive and preventive approach in dealing with sexual abuse of children. With these programs, we can be proactive by offering a strong prevention program—and I'm proud to be a part of this program."

The Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina, is implementing both the live training and the VIRTUS Online™ components of the Protecting God's Children program. Charlotte has already trained local trainers and is finalizing a rigorous schedule to provide training for adults throughout the diocese.

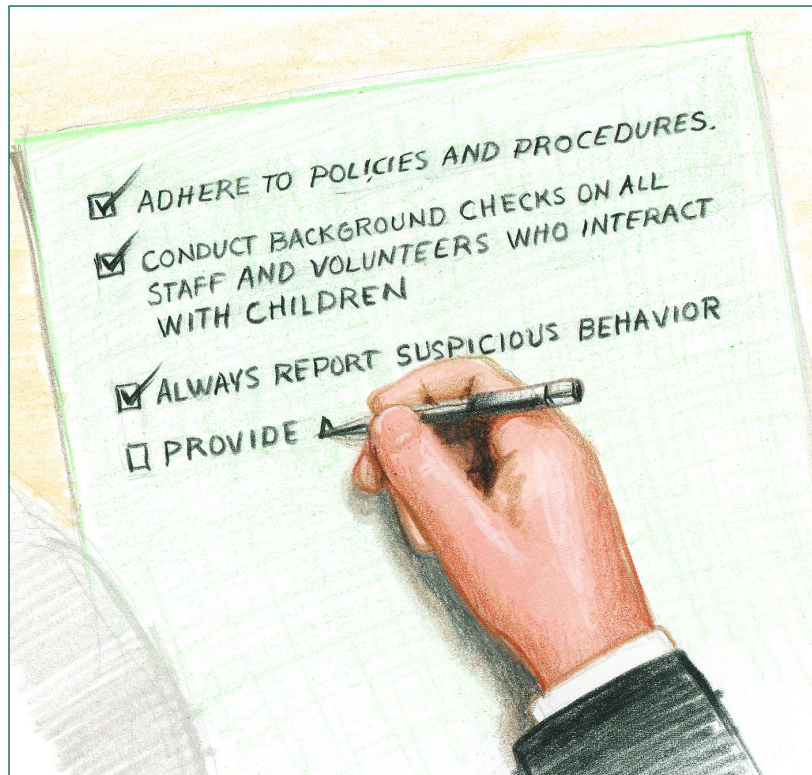
Terri Wilhelm, human resource associate for the Diocese of Charlotte, said she's pleased with the practical value of the training and other materials. "The program not only defines the problem of child sexual abuse, but also offers concrete steps people can take to keep the problem from occurring in the first place."

Wilhelm said she's especially pleased with the diocese's ability "to have our own group of trainers who can go out into the diocese and present the same, consistent program as often as needed."

"After participating in the training with several different groups, I know that it is impossible to ignore the very powerful message of these programs," Wilhelm said.

"The videos are especially effective, and the feedback we've received so far from participants confirms that."

The Diocese of Palm Beach, Florida, is implementing the Protecting God's Children program for all clergy, religious brothers and sisters, lay employees, and all volunteers with access to children. Lorraine Sabatella, chancellor for the Diocese of Palm Beach, said she appreciates the fact that the VIRTUS programs "have already laid the groundwork for educating people about the horrors of child sexual abuse and assisting dioceses in creating a safe environment for children. Using an established program meant that we could reach all of our people in a more timely manner."



Creating your school mission statement

A long-term vision of continuous improvement for catholic schools

By Philip J. Lazarus, PhD, NCSP
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Ensuring a safe and secure environment needs to be part of a school's mission statement before the staff start implementing violence prevention programs in their buildings. If not, then the interventions that are implemented (e.g., aggression replacement training, peer mediation, bully proofing, character education, threat assessment) may be viewed as a luxury that can be supported only in good times.

Ron Stephens, director of the National School Safety Center, suggests that a school's mission statement should include the context in which learning will occur. For example, the phrase "to learn in a safe and secure environment free of drugs, violence, and fear" emphasizes the school's commitment to creating and enforcing policies that promote a safe, caring, and disciplined school climate. When the mission of the school is to ensure that its campuses are safe and secure, then violence prevention programs and activities are considered essential.

In writing a mission statement, all members of the school community should have representation. This includes the faculty, administration, support staff, parents and, most importantly, students. As noted by Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the best mission statements are those that are the result of all

stakeholders getting together in a spirit of mutual respect, expressing different views, and working together to create something greater than any one individual or subgroup could do alone. Because so much collaboration and compromise is required, creating a mission statement is hard work.

When Stephen R. Covey begins to work with companies that have already developed some kind of mission statement, he

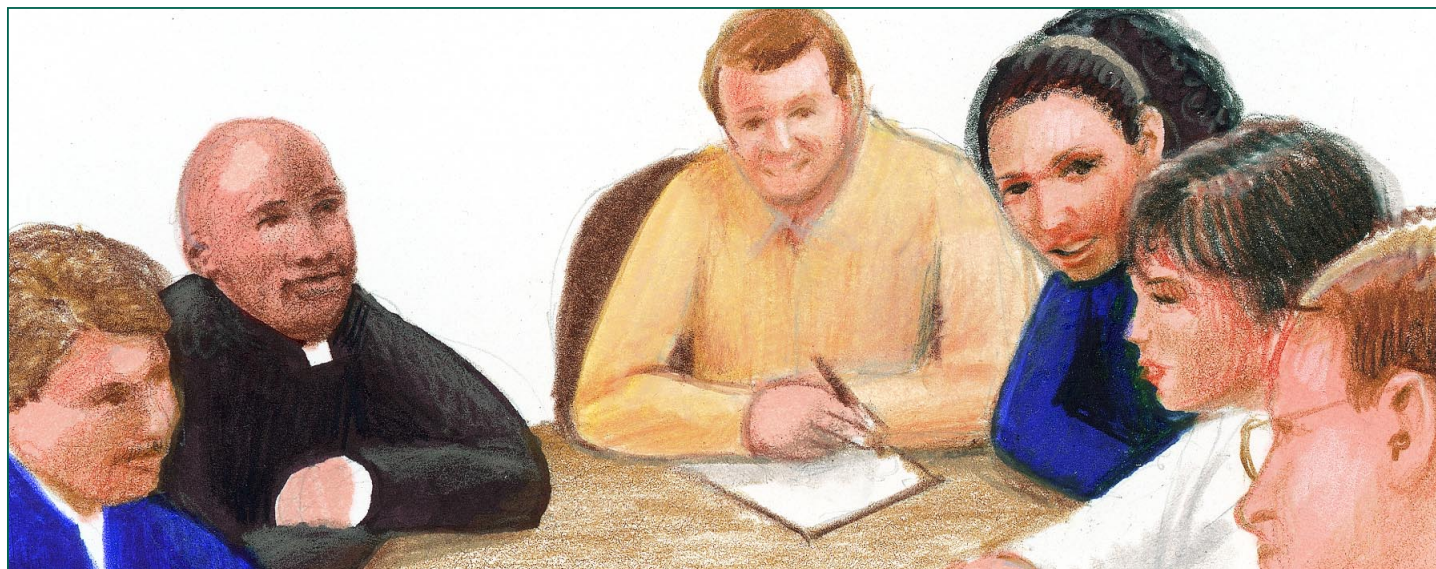
*A school without
a mission statement
is like a pilot without
a flight plan.*

asks these questions: How many people here know that you have a mission statement? How many of you know what it contains? How many were involved in creating it? How many really buy into it and use it as a frame of reference in making decisions? He emphasizes that one of the fundamental problems in organizations is that people are not committed when other people make determinations about their lives. They simply do not buy into them. He states, "Without involvement, there is no commitment. Mark it down, asterisk it, circle it, and underline it. No involvement, no commitment."

The process of writing a school mission

statement is nearly as valuable as the end product itself. Writing a mission statement is important in that it requires all the members of the school community to come together to share their vision for the school. It forces all stakeholders to deeply and critically examine the essential priorities of the school community and to align the actions of the school with their stated goals and aspirations. It is a proactive process that requires the school to publicly declare its core beliefs and describe what the school stands for as a community. In a way, a mission statement becomes a constitution—the standard and criterion for planning, making decisions, and evaluating progress.

Let's examine two useful mission statements that are close to my heart. First, is the mission of the VIRTUS® programs. The mission of the VIRTUS programs is "to provide the Church with awareness, education, communication, and management tools that prevent losses or reduce the damage caused by losses that may simply be unpreventable." Furthermore, this mission is supported by the application of three core principles: awareness, communication, and timely response. This mission statement provides a clear sense of the purpose of the VIRTUS programs, and emphasizes how best to accomplish this goal. In fact, I have incorporated these core principles into my own personal life. At times I have wondered if the tragedy of September 11 could have been prevented if our government was more aware of the threat of terrorism, if all





government agencies communicated more effectively with each other, and if our government had acted decisively with a timely response.

Second, is the mission statement of the National Emergency Assistance Team (NEAT). As chairperson of NEAT, I helped create our mission statement which is “to support school crisis prevention and intervention services through training, education, advocacy, and mobile response in order to enhance the emotional well being of our nation’s youth.” This statement is practical—it describes three core elements that should be included in any mission statement: what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. Creating this mission statement took many months. It guides our team in everything we do. For example, when I submit quarterly reports, all our goals, objectives, and activities are described under four major headings: Training, Education, Advocacy, and Mobile response (the acronym TEAM).

In the last issue of the *COMMUNICARE*®, I discussed the publication, *Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools*, published by the Learning First Alliance. The central theme is that schools must become safe and supportive learning communities. Each and every word in this phrase—safe, supportive, learning, community—is critical. They note that if schools are not safe, little learning takes place. However, even if schools are safe and orderly, if they do not strive for high academic achievement or build a sense of community, then learning will be compromised.

Hence, in writing or revising a school mission statement, I suggest that an emphasis needs to be placed on the school becoming a safe and supportive learning community. In all phases of planning, deci-

sion-making, and evaluation, the school can determine how its goals and objectives line up with their stated purposes. Each year, the school planning committee can ask fundamental questions such as these:

1. What can we do to ensure that our campus is safe?
2. How can we make our school more nurturing and supportive?
3. What programs, strategies, and interventions can we use to increase academic learning for all students?
4. How can we instill a greater sense of community in our school?

A few months ago, we learned about airline passengers who tackled an alleged terrorist (known as the “shoe bomber”) who was attempting to light explosives that were allegedly concealed in his shoe. The group communication and timely response of these alert individuals averted a potential disaster. Consequently, safety is no longer seen as only the province of the pilots, mechanics, air traffic controllers, and security personnel—but passengers as well.

Similarly, ensuring that our schools are safe and secure is no longer just the responsibility of the school principal and other administrators. School safety is a mission for all of us. Let’s tackle it.

Phillip J. Lazarus, Ph.D., serves as chairperson of the National Emergency Assistance Team (NEAT) of the National Association of School Psychologists. Dr. Lazarus is an associate professor and director of the School Psychology Training Program at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. He is facilitator of the experts for the violence prevention component of National Catholic's VIRTUS® programs: "Managing the Risk of Violence in Schools, Workplaces and Other Public Places.

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“After watching the videos and seeing the reaction of participants in our initial sessions, it is clear that this is a quality program that should enable us to reach all our goals in this regard,” Sabatella said.

Flexibility is important for all three dioceses, and flexibility is a primary goal for National Catholic in all the VIRTUS® programs. Some aspects of flexibility are obvious—such as allowing dioceses to post their custom policies and procedures on the VIRTUS *Online*™ system alongside the VIRTUS model workplace policies. Other aspects of flexibility are equally important, but less obvious.

All three dioceses are testing that flexibility as they review and revise their policies and procedures and schedule Protecting God’s Children™ training. Wilhelm said “We realize that this is a new program with all the challenges that go along with implementing something new and different. We appreciate the flexibility that National Catholic has shown in allowing us to set up our program in a way that works for our diocese.”

Diocesan officials at Portland, Charlotte, and Palm Beach are all three anxious to fully utilize the VIRTUS *Online* system. Sabatella said “So far the articles and information I have read on the website have been excellent and very useful. I anticipate the VIRTUS *Online* system will play a major role in the continuing education of all those we are asking to participate in the program.”

Wilhelm said she’s very impressed with the VIRTUS *Online* system and the depth of information available. And she specifically mentioned the system’s value in helping provide continuing education. “We know that the retention of knowledge from live training diminishes with time,” Wilhelm said. “That’s why we are providing the online system—as a continuing education tool.”

“We are very hopeful that our staff and volunteers will take full advantage of the program,” Wilhelm continued. “We are presenting the program with the expectation that they will use it, and, the quality of the system speaks for itself. I think that as people begin to make use of VIRTUS *Online*, word will spread and it will become widely used throughout the diocese.”

As a human resource professional, Chamberlain is excited about yet another dimension of VIRTUS

Online. “Utilized properly, it is a tremendous tool to communicate with our trainers and to organize and monitor our program internally,” Chamberlain said. “We can use it to schedule training, to track the progress of individuals who are going through the training and for communicating with our trainers. I see it as a great repository of human resource information and tools.”

Altogether, more than 15 archdioceses and dioceses are in the process of implementing components of the VIRTUS programs—with most of the emphasis on providing Protecting God’s Children

training to those who interact with children. In coming months, we’ll provide you with more updates, including modifications suggested by you our client.

If you have questions about the Protecting God’s Children program, or would like additional information about any of the VIRTUS programs, contact Jack McCalmon, director of VIRTUS programs and services, toll-free at 1-888-847-8870. And, we encourage you to visit our VIRTUS *Online* home page, which provides fresh content every week to anyone with access to the Internet. Our website address is www.virtus.org.

