

Spinning the Straw of Adversity into a Golden Ministry



By Pat Neal
National Coordinator of the VIRTUS[®] Programs

It seems like you can't open the morning newspaper or watch the evening news without being overwhelmed by the latest string of tragedies. It is painfully obvious that we are living in troubled and insecure times. While it might be nice to live in the Norman Rockwell world of yesteryear, we can't. Instead, we are left to come together or fall apart as we face crises that directly affect us.

On September 11, 2001, we faced one of the greatest challenges in our nation's history. It could have torn us apart as a nation, as our enemies desired; but, instead, we came together from all areas of our country to face the crisis head on. Our individual geographic location, income, race, age, and marital status didn't matter—we came together with a common purpose and vision to overcome the threats to all of us. Thankfully, we have moved on, and this is now a part of our *history*.

The tragedy some have defined as the "crisis of the Church" has the potential to profoundly injure us both as a people and, more importantly, as the collective body of Christ. Indeed, many thought that this crisis could potentially destroy the very fabric of the Church. Yet, today, we continue to work together to meet this test head-on, not only to solve the crisis, but also to make the Church stronger. We approach this challenge with the goal of ultimately creating a more positive future for our children. This undertaking involves holding the Church to the highest standard—not only as a guide for its members, but also as a model for others to follow.

Those of us who work within the VIRTUS[®] programs have been honored to work side-by-side with the Church in this effort. Our support of the Church has been a mission-driven labor of devotion on behalf of many focused individuals. We are committed to a working partnership with the Church. And, as individuals, we are committed to the values and vision of the Church. From the VIRTUS program trainers, to the facilitators and coordinators, to all who have a role in the VIRTUS programs, each and every individual has the heart and commitment to ensure the protection of God's children. Ours truly is a ministry.

Just as Christ promised in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," we too consider ourselves blessed to be an integral part of the ministry for which we care so deeply. We strive in humility, yet are determined in our efforts to see the Church in an even stronger position of ministry to those in need. For those of you who work tirelessly, sacrifice your time, and are stewards on behalf of the Church, your reward is great.

To date, we have partnered with 77 dioceses nationwide to implement the *Protecting God's Children*[™] program. It has been a time of successful teamwork and positive, effective communication. It is rewarding to see dioceses working together and communicating their ideas to further develop the program's value and impact. Dioceses have enthusiastically taken ownership of the program and are committed to its success—not only within their individual dioceses, but also throughout and, indeed, beyond the boundaries of the Church.

We continue to receive encouraging feedback from dioceses where the *Protecting God's Children* program has made a difference—where a child has been shielded from a terrible act because a caring adult has embraced the safe environment program.

As you can see, the VIRTUS and *Protecting God's Children* programs are much more than “just programs.” They are ministries of love for many and an opportunity to dedicate ourselves and our skills in support of our greatest gifts and resources—our children. Please let us know how we can help you in this effort.

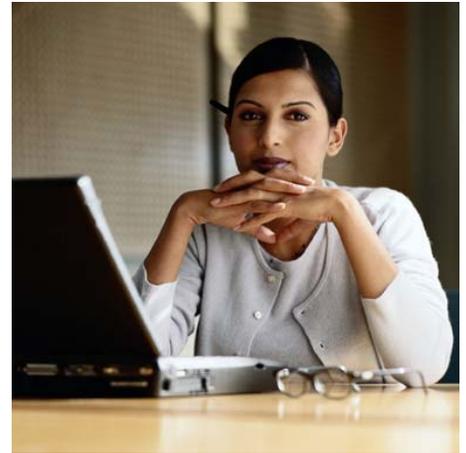
Spinning Raw Data into Genuine Continuous Improvement

By Jeff Lester
Managing Editor of the VIRTUS Online™ Website

When you consider the size of the Catholic population in the United States, ongoing training seems like a staggering task. Yet, thousands of Catholics are visiting the VIRTUS Online™ website each month to read the new articles, participate in the interactive scenarios and poll questions and, most importantly, to complete their continuing education as a follow-up to the *Protecting God's Children*™ awareness sessions.

And though the numbers seem somewhat sterile at “first blush,” when it comes to the activity on the VIRTUS Online website, the numbers pretty much speak for themselves. For example, with 77 dioceses either on the *Protecting God's Children* program or preparing to launch the program, we are currently experiencing more than THREE MILLION hits per month on the website. And, we've had two different days when we surpassed 300,000 hits in a single day—one in October and one in November. In both cases, each day was as active as the entire month of January 2003.

Before you get too excited by these raw numbers, remember that a “hit” is a “click” by someone on the website. Hence, an individual visitor may generate several “clicks” during a single visit. Yet, the raw numbers tell us a lot about the activities of our visitors. For example: Since the initial launch of VIRTUS Online in July 2002, we've consistently experienced between 35 and 40 hits per visit on the website.



Let's put that into perspective. When I'm visiting a typical high-profile website—the CNN website, for example—I might make a dozen or more “clicks” as I surf through the “breaking news” and other items that catch my attention. Now, consider the 35 to 40 hits per visit that we experience on the VIRTUS Online system. This consistently high number tells us that the average visitor is reading our new weekly content, participating in our interactive scenario questions and poll questions, and reading the most current ongoing training materials available on the website. Combine this with the average visit time of approximately 15 minutes, and you can quickly see that VIRTUS Online is having a regular and frequent impact on the lives of thousands of Catholics across the nation.

And, speaking of visit time, since the initial launch of the program, we've consistently averaged approximately 15 minutes per visit by those who use the website. In November 2003, with approximately 90,000 individual visitors, the total “visit time” was roughly 22,500 hours. So, at any given time (24 hours a day, seven days a week), there was an average of more than 31 people visiting VIRTUS Online. Relatively speaking, all of these numbers were ZEROS when the website was launched in July 2002. So, the numbers have risen; but, for those of us who are intimately involved in managing the website, what do these raw numbers *really* mean?

Obviously, the number of visitors, number of hits, and average visit time give us a snapshot that reflects the quality of material that we're providing to Catholic dioceses across the country. When analyzed on a day-by-day and week-by-week basis, we can see that the usage increases in conjunction with dioceses completing their awareness sessions and registering large groups of end users on the system.

We also can see some “seasonal” patterns. For example, when the school year ended in late May and early June, website activity dropped dramatically and remained “flat” throughout the summer. Then, from the middle of August, and continuing through the first two weeks of September, usage increased sharply on a week-by-week basis. Though we have spring and summer data only from 2003, we've speculated that the sharp drop in May and June and the sharp increase in

August and September illustrates the number of teachers and school personnel who use the program on a daily and weekly basis. If the same pattern presents itself in 2004, this will largely confirm our speculation and validate our instinct that the *Protecting God's Children* program is making an impact on Catholic schools through the ongoing training of school personnel.

Another way we use the numbers is to gauge the interest in particular topics. We realize that any given week may have higher or lower usage numbers for reasons that we can't yet identify. However, on an ongoing basis, we review and evaluate the performance of individual expert writers based on the number of visits and hits on the weeks that each author is featured. In all fairness, some weeks are inherently destined to have more activity because of the number of new training bulletins that are posted during those weeks. Hence, we sometimes *move* authors around on our schedule to make sure that the comparative analysis is an "apples-to-apples" evaluation.



The same is true with topics. Some topics garner more visits than others. Relatively speaking, human resources-related topics receive fewer visits and hits than our overall average, while articles on pornography, for example, consistently receive more visits and hits than any other topic. Each time that we've run featured articles on pornography and other "adult" materials, we've set new records for both the number of visits and the number of hits. This type of analysis helps us select topics that are related to child sexual abuse and that provide both a Church perspective and public policy perspective that furthers our mission of rallying both individuals and communities to help generate safe environments to protect children.

As more and more people complete their awareness sessions, and as thousands across the nation complete their monthly, bi-monthly, and annual, ongoing training, we will continue to monitor and analyze the usage activity and to continuously refine the quality and distribution of materials available on the website. So, the total of 3.2 million hits in November 2003 gives us a snapshot of where we are currently in the development and implementation of the *Protecting God's Children* program. But, the daily, weekly, and monthly trends that we see in coming weeks and months will help us to keep our programs fresh, interesting, and informative—fulfilling our promise to you that we will continuously improve our programs—as we all work together to protect God's children.

Spinning Needs and Requirements into Quality Programs

By Sharon Doty
Independent Consultant, and VIRTUS® Programs Developer and Trainer

During the first full year of implementation of the *Protecting Gods' Children*™ program, many participants have demonstrated their anger and frustration with the crisis facing the Church in the United States. They wonder how United States bishops could continue to let child molesters have access to children. They don't understand how this could happen to us—God's faithful people.

There are many ways to view the crisis in the Church in the United States. Perhaps the answer to the question "Why?" lies in the realization that we are "God's faithful people."



Throughout history, the Roman Catholic Church has faced adversity, challenge, and the dark forces of evil. Sometimes we have even turned a blind eye to the harm being perpetrated. History reminds us that we have sometimes lost our way in the struggle to stay faithful to God's design for humanity. In fact, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, published by the International Theological Commission in December 1999, reveals once again the Holy Father's reliance on "...unconditional trust in the power of the Truth."ⁱ

One powerful, vivid example of this willingness to account for our human shortcomings is demonstrated in the Holy Father's public request for forgiveness from the world's Jewish community for the failures of the Church when Hitler's Nazi's were killing millions of Jews.

The power and mystery of the Church is that it is "at the same time holy and ever in need of purification."ⁱⁱ The Church exemplifies God's grace in action in the world—"and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Church also diligently and relentlessly seeks out sinners, admonishes them to confess their sins, and welcomes their return to the healing mercy of God's love. The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*ⁱⁱⁱ and *Essential Norms for*

Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons^{iv} are the most recent demonstrations of this paradox.

In response to the mandates of the *Charter* and the *Essential Norms*, 77 dioceses and archdioceses in the United States are in the process of implementing what many in authority have referred to as the “Cadillac” of all the safe environment programs—*Protecting God’s Children for Adults*. One might say that the broad interest in and acceptance of the program is a testament to God’s hand in the development of a program destined to empower each and every member of the faith community to be a protector of children.



Protecting God’s Children for Adults is designed to raise awareness about the nature and scope of child sexual abuse and to provide adults access to tools with which they can create safe environments for children. By implementing the awareness program and by engaging participants in continuing education via the *VIRTUS Online*[™] (Internet-based) system, dioceses are able to address the fundamental requirements of the *Charter* and the *Essential Norms*.

Depending on how you look at it, awareness opens the door to education or education opens the door to awareness. Continuing education, meanwhile, provides reinforcement for the behavior modification required to create and maintain safe environments. *VIRTUS Online* is a primary and critical tool through which safety for children and those who minister to them will ultimately be achieved.

Our commitment to preventing child sexual abuse is a critical *proactive* response to the issue. The *VIRTUS* programs are, however, both *proactive* and *reactive*. Establishing *proactive* programs to prevent this type of situation from ever occurring again is an essential part of the Church’s response to the current crisis. It is consistent with the Church being God’s grace in action in the world. However, closing the holes in the safety net that surrounds our faith community is only the first step toward healing the wounds of this crisis.

Reactively, the Church is dealing with the existing pain and suffering and providing dioceses, archdioceses, and organizations with the tools to manage current and future issues. This is also critical to the Church’s ability to bring healing to the entire faith community. It is the Church seeking out and demonstrating “...unconditional trust in the power of the Truth.”^v

The *reactive* elements of the *VIRTUS* programs and the additional *proactive* components provide a comprehensive, effective, and well-thought-out response to all the issues raised by the child sexual abuse scandal. Plus, the *Charter* and *Essential Norms* require compliance in a number of other areas that can be powerfully and positively impacted by the *VIRTUS* programs. Some of those areas include:

- Child sexual abuse awareness, education, and training specifically for parents and guardians. (*Protecting God’s Children for Parents and Guardians*)
- Victim assistance programs that utilize volunteer support for victims of abuse by clergy and other Church personnel. (*Victim Advocacy Program*)
- Case management programs that provide compassionate support for the victim, the accused, and the faith community. (*Pastoral Case Management Program*)
- Investigation training that gives people the skills to conduct fair, objective, and canonically appropriate investigations of any type of wrongdoing. (*Investigation Training Program*)
- Boundaries training to assist those in ministry in identifying boundary issues, establishing appropriate ecclesiastical boundaries, and assisting others in reestablishing appropriate boundaries in their lives. (*Boundaries Training Workshop*)

The foundation is in place. Our clients know that National Catholic is committed to providing the best, cutting-edge technology to the Church to help address these sensitive, painful, and very serious issues. It is now time to take steps to build on this firm foundation.

For example, virtually every diocese or archdiocese has named a Victim Assistance Coordinator as required by the *Charter*. However, merely identifying someone to hold the job title does not satisfy the provisions of the *Charter*. There are also mandates for networking with community social service organizations and providing comprehensive assistance to families and other secondary victims. The *Victim Advocacy Program* addresses these issues effectively and economically.

Through the *Victim Advocacy Program*, a diocese receives a program manual that includes all the essential elements for creating a victim advocacy program that meets the guidelines of the *Charter*. The manual provides resources, guidelines, and program structures for implementing an assistance program. But, it doesn't stop there. The *Victim Advocacy Program* includes an initial training session for people who are willing to provide voluntary advocacy support services to victims. This training session accomplishes two important objectives:

- Training a team of up to 25 volunteers to provide advocacy services.
- Training someone in the diocese to conduct future advocate training sessions.

Through the *Victim Advocacy Program*, a diocese establishes a core team of dedicated volunteers to support victims through the healing process and, at the same time, trains someone locally to provide this training in the future. The program is effective in both its services to victims and in its relatively small economic impact on a diocese.

Adopting and customizing a *Victim Advocacy Program* is an excellent way for a diocese or archdiocese to continue to develop a comprehensive approach to the issues raised by the child sexual abuse crisis. It builds on the *Protecting God's Children* foundation by bringing the VIRTUS programs' standard of excellence to the issue of victim assistance.

The *Victim Advocacy Program* and the other VIRTUS programs available to augment the *Protecting God's Children* program are designed to help dioceses, archdioceses, and organizations address a variety of serious systemic issues. Now is the time to concentrate on the continuing integration of all of these programs into a comprehensive risk control platform for each of the Church's dioceses, archdioceses, and organizations in the United States.

When the VIRTUS programs were first being developed, National Catholic chose "Excellence Builds Trust" as a motto to guide in the development and implementation. The *excellence* of our *Protecting God's Children* program has created a foundation of *trust* for the quality of the VIRTUS programs. This framework for continuing expansion is our cornerstone for fulfilling National Catholic's vision of helping generate safe environments throughout the Church's many faith communities.



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ⁱ *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, International Theological Commission, December 1999, Introduction.

ⁱⁱ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, Revised Edition*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., November 2002. The *Charter* and its contents are the copyright property of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

^{iv} *The Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Congregation for Bishops, Washington, D.C., December 8, 2002. The *Norms* and its contents are the copyright property of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

^v *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, International Theological Commission, December 1999, Introduction.