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Welcome to Our New Newsletter

We would like to welcome you to the new continuing education instrument for the personnel of the Archdiocese of New York. Previously, those who had registered in connection with the VIRTUS "Protecting God's Children" class were receiving email bulletins to provide them with on-going training and updates. We have decided to replace that email bulletin and to make continuing education available to more people, by means of this newsletter. Our goal is to make this information more pertinent to the Archdiocese and our policies and practices. As a result, we hope that it will be more useful to you.

Here's how it works. If you were receiving email updates from VIRTUS, you will now get this newsletter. We're also going to send it to all principals and religious education directors, and ask them to distribute or post it, so all their staff members can have access to it. Thank you for all that you do to serve God by working with the children of the Archdiocese. May God bless you all.

Sincerely,

Edward Mechmann, Director, Safe Environment Program

Why Are The Codes Of Conduct Important?

Patrick McGuire, MSW

Preventing risks to children involves a number of "lines of defense". The initial defense is our "gate-keeping" process: screening all our personnel, obtaining background checks, and requiring a training class. But predators have navigated such processes before, so we must remain vigilant. This is why the Code of Conduct is so essential.

The Codes of Conduct for Clergy and Laity in the Archdiocese of New York, and their counterparts in other dioceses, serve to not only build a safe environment, but to preserve them into the future. They also have benefits beyond the spectrum of the safe environment concept. Some of the most basic reasons for instituting the codes are time-honored common sense. If all our parishes and schools are using the same printed rules for appropriate behaviors around our children, then inconsistencies between locations can be eliminated. This fosters a greater trust by removing the old "that's just how we do it around here" explanation for behaviors and policies that could place people (not just children) at risk. Though different locations will have to add some extra rules to deal with unique, local situations, the basic rules remain constant from location to location. This consistency is important not only because it makes simple sense, but because, if it is properly enforced, it presents formidable obstacles to predators.

Anyone receiving this newsletter does so because they completed training that raised their awareness about child abuse. Therefore, all of you are aware that a very common trait of predators is that they do not feel that rules apply to them. It's important to understand that this trait is not some-

thing they arrived at through a logic process or a willful decision they made to ignore rules; it is a personal-ity characteristic that they express.

This is where the Code of Conduct comes in. They are a set of rules to be followed. Period! Everyone who works with kids is given a copy of the Code; they sign a sheet verifying they received it; hence they cannot claim ignorance when they are confronted. People who have trouble following the rules will stand out from their peers, and predators do not want to stand out that way. They thrive on the positive image they have constructed. And they use that image to accumulate the time needed to seduce their victim and groom the community around them. The key word there is "time." They need time to perpetrate their activities. And many of them will not get that time if the Code is enforced. They will ignore or bend the Code, because they feel it does not apply to them. They will do so more than once. So what happens when they do?

Any violation of the Code of Conduct, however minor it may seem on its face, must be immediately addressed and corrected. As we often hear in the homeland security context, "If you see something, say something". The proper first step is always to bring the matter to the attention of a supervisor -- or intervene immediately yourself if the child is in imminent danger. The kind of corrective action taken by a supervisor, of course, will depend on the severity of the violation. Some violations are



grounds for immediate dismissal from the program (e.g., using alcohol when working with children) while others require that the incident be reported to law enforcement

authorities (e.g., sharing pornography with a child, touching a child in a sexual manner, or sending indecent emails to a child). Other, less serious, breaches may be dealt with by giving a verbal warning on the first offense, supervising the person more closely afterwards, and taking more serious corrective action if the offense is repeated. If a person is dismissed from a program due to a violation of the Code of Conduct, this should be reported to the Safe Environment Office, so we can make sure the person doesn't just shift over to a new program.

The result is predictable: if a predator does gain employment or become a volunteer where they shouldn't, they will not be able to get the "alone time" with any potential victim; either because they are forced to follow the code by other alert adults around them, or they get dismissed early in their efforts because they broke the Code.

This is only one piece of the Safe Environment Program, but it is crucial. Please help us to keep our children safe both now, and in the future. Please be sure the codes are followed.



Note: As always, feel free to ask questions about this newsletter. We are keenly aware that the topics we discuss are difficult to cover completely in a page of print. You can e-mail questions to safe@archny.org, or contact our Training Director, Patrick McGuire at 845-452-1171 x-4218.