

Overview of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*

“The *Charter* is a comprehensive set of procedures established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in June, 2002 for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The *Charter* also includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability, and prevention of future acts of abuse.” USCCB In 2005, the USCCB made minor changes to the original *Charter*, primarily addressing needs for verb tense changes.

“The *Charter* directs action in all of the following matters:

- Creating a safe environment for children and young people;
- Healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors;
- Prompt and effective response to allegations;
- Cooperation with civil authorities;
- Disciplining offenders;
- Providing for means of accountability for the future to ensure the problem continues to be effectively dealt with through a national Office of Child and Youth Protection and a National Review Board.” USCCB

Which Articles from the Charter Pertain to Creating a Safe Environment for Our Children and Young People?

Article 12 of the *2005 Charter* states: “Dioceses are to maintain ‘safe environment’ programs which the diocesan bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people. Dioceses are to make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to children.” The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, USCCB.

Article 13 states: “Dioceses are to evaluate the background of all...priests and deacons who are engaged in ecclesiastical ministry...and all diocesan and parish/school or other paid personnel and volunteers whose duties include ongoing, unsupervised contact with minors. Specifically, they are to utilize the resources of law enforcement and other community agencies.” USCCB, *2005 Charter*.

What Documentation Will Be Required?

Additionally, Article 9 addresses the responsibilities of The Office for Child and Youth Protection regarding the issue of accountability, including suggestions for training personnel, the annual audit and the annual public report.

What are the necessary elements of a “safe-environment” program?

1. Drafting of a “Code of Conduct” for all adults who work with youth on a regular basis.
2. Training of parents, ministers, educators, church personnel, volunteers and others regularly involved with minors as to the issue of abuse of children, to include sexual abuse.
3. Training programs for children and young people that incorporate age-appropriate materials pertaining to personal safety. This includes information about both proper and improper touching, and healthy and unhealthy relationships. *Children are not expected to be fully knowledgeable about child abuse or of the laws governing care of children, but they need to know when they should seek assistance from a trusted adult.*