



DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG
Office of the Bishop

May 29, 2026

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As Catholics, we share a sacred obligation to protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our community.

In the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, our Safe Environment program has been in place since 2002, specifically to ensure children, young people, and vulnerable adults are protected. This protection is not just accomplished by our clergy, employees, and cleared volunteers, but by all people of good will, working together to ensure the safety of our children and by continuing education for our children in providing awareness trainings and strengthening all of our prevention efforts.

Our Safe Environment program for adults and children is being updated in accordance with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* Article 12. Our goal is to reinforce the Diocese of Saint Petersburg's efforts to ensure the safest possible environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults through awareness training and by strengthening all of our prevention initiatives. This will ensure that all adults and minors have important information on how to identify warning signs of abuse and how to properly report any suspected abuse.

While we have had a comprehensive outreach in place, the promulgation of the new Safe Environment Program training, effective July 1, 2026, includes the following initiatives:

- Implementation of the VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children*® for Adults training for adults serving within the Diocese, as well as other renewal/recertification trainings by the VIRTUS Programs.
- Implementation of the VIRTUS *Empowering God's Children*® annual training for all children enrolled in the Catholic Schools and religious education classes in the diocese.
- The program materials are continually updated and easily accessible through the VIRTUS Online website.
- The VIRTUS Programs are owned by National Catholic Services, LLC. The first program was developed and launched in 2001 and has been continuously updated to reflect current research and best practices.

- To date, more than 130 Dioceses and Eparchies utilize the VIRTUS Programs in some capacity.

I am most grateful for all of the hard work done in parishes and schools to ensure that all of the mandates of the USCCB *Charter* are effectively implemented. I am also grateful to staff and volunteers who have been so gracious in their cooperation with these requirements. It is the dedicated work of so many who strive daily to keep our children safe.

In closing, I reaffirm our commitment to work diligently to promote safe environments throughout the Diocese of Saint Petersburg in our efforts to protect children and restore the trust of the faithful in the Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of Saint Petersburg

