

## ***PROTECTION OF OUR CHILDREN AND THE USCCB AUDIT***

***By Carol DeLois, Chancellor***

**In June 2002, the Catholic Bishops of the United States approved the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The *Charter* was the Church's response to the number of reported alleged cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. The *Charter* looked backward at reported cases outlining remedies and forward to a systematic plan to prevent future abuse cases. Dioceses throughout the United States were required to respond to this crisis and put into place safe environments training to protect children, elderly and the vulnerable.**

**The Diocese of Cheyenne adopted safe environments training programs, approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, that would train adults and children how to recognize and respond to abuse in schools, neighborhoods and at home. Parents, wanting their children to feel safe, secure and loved, felt conflicted with the necessity of their children being taught to be alert to the signs where individuals crossed proper boundaries and the threats those crossings pose to them. We do not want them to sense fear. While this is hoped for by all parents, we also want our children to have the knowledge necessary to protect them, if situations arise that are unsafe or threatening.**

**With this in mind, we chose a safe environments program for our children that was age appropriate and broken down into four groups; primary, intermediate, junior high, and high school students. This program was the model used by the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and approved by the auditors – those charged with charter compliance -- of the USCCB. We were given permission to use the program, and it has been in place since December 31, 2003. The program is still being presented to students in our Catholic schools and religious education classes in the Diocese of Cheyenne. We have also adopted safe environments video series, including, “Yello-Dyno”, “Tricky People,” and “Breaking the Silence.” Over thirty-five hundred children receive training each year.**

**Key to this training is the commitment and support of parents in recognizing the importance of protecting their children and allowing them to participate in the training process. Each year, the training takes place during class time, both in the Catholic schools and during religious education classes. Parents receive notice of the training before it is presented, allowing those who do not want their children to be trained to sign a declination form.**

**We selected the Girls and Boys Town model for training adults who work with children and other vulnerable young people and adults. If you work for the Diocese or a parish, if you are a member of the clergy, a teacher or a volunteer, you have**

received this training. Trainers are located in every deanery, and during the past year, over thirty trainings took place throughout the Diocese. We have 45 trainers qualified to teach this model. Since 2003, 4,429 adults have completed the safe environments training.

It is for our children and about our children that we adults give up a few hours to learn the steps we must take to keep them safe. It is worth every minute of our time to take the safe environments training. The Catholic Church has made great strides and has set a precedent in this arena.

In addition to trainings, all clergy, lay people, educators and volunteers who work or volunteer for the diocese, parishes or schools are required to complete a successful background check. The background check is mandatory before anyone is hired or begins volunteer work.

Each year, every diocese in the United States completes the forms required by the USCCB in response to the *Charter*. This procedure involves the gathering of information and numbers in order to report that we have done everything possible to comply with the goals of the *Charter*, “To Promote Healing and Reconciliation with the Victims/Survivors of Sexual Abuse of Minors,” “To Guarantee an Effective Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors.” “To Ensure the Accountability of Our Procedures,” and “To Protect the Faithful in the Future.”

In August 2010, we will, once again, prepare an audit report to the Gavin Group, the auditors who represent the USCCB in auditing each Diocese. We have received a compliance rating each year since the *Charter* was mandated. It is through your efforts, support and love for our children that this has been possible.

The term “team effort” is used for many reasons and situations. For this purpose, I don’t know a more dedicated team than all of you who have worked diligently to make sure our children are safe. A special thank you to Bishop Paul Etienne, Father Mike Carr, our priests, deacons, religious, teachers and lay volunteers for your efforts and dedication to make this goal a success.

God bless us all, especially, the beautiful gifts God has given us, our children.