Diocese Moves Ahead with Anti-Abuse Campaign

Local Efforts Comply with Bishops’ Charter to Protect Children

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio released a Jan. 6 statement concerning the response by the Diocese of Brooklyn’s compliance with the 2002 charter issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for the Protection of Children and Young People. The Charter, called the “Diocese’ compliant with the provisions of the charter,” is a response given to one of its initiatives called “Polling” for attention on four aspects of the diocesan response to the charter.

At the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office of Child and Youth Protection released its first annual report on the implementation of the charter by the 196 dioceses and Eastern Church eparchies in the country at a Washington press confr. The report covered the period between June 2002, when the bishops signed the charter and the first year, when it was in effect. The report is based on a comprehensive review by the USCCB’s Child and Youth Protection staff of all diocesan and eparchial reports submitted.

The report is the first comprehensive report conducted by a national body on the implementation of the charter. It includes data on the number of reports received, the number of investigations conducted, the number of cases referred to law enforcement, and the number of cases closed.

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Lessons of the Year of the Monkey

Cardinal Van Thuan wrote: “Some people close their eyes in order to avoid looking, some people turn their faces away in order to avoid seeing, some people stop their ears in order to avoid hearing, some people turn a deaf ear in order not to hear. But truth is still there clearly, carefully, learn from reality, learn from others. Reality is the lesson, your neighbour is your teacher.” How important it is that instead of avoiding evil that we do good. It is the lesson of our Christian faith that we can take to heart as we celebrate with our Oriental brothers and sisters the beginning of the Lunar New Year. We take this opportunity to wish them the peace and happiness of the New Year, which they have begun together.

I met Cardinal Van Thuan personally in Vietnam, and later visited him many times when he went to Rome to become eventually the head of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace. Someday I hope that this great man of the Church will be recognized as a confessor of the faith and the white martyr that he was and be elevated to the glory of the altar. If you wish to learn more about the late Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, a new book written by Dr. Andre Nguyen Van Chau has been recently published by the Pauline Books and Media of Boston. Dr. Van Chau is also a longtime friend and one who knew the late Cardinal personally. The book is entitled “The Miracle of Hope: Political Prisoner, Prophet of Peace.” The book gives a great insight not only into the Cardinal’s life, but also the Catholicity of Vietnam.

Before I close I want to recount an interesting incident that happened as I was on my way to the Bishops’ annual retreat in Florida. I was at the airport waiting for the plane and somehow I was seated near the passengers who needed special help boarding the plane. There were six wheelchairs lined up near where I was seated. I was not wearing my pectoral cross since it would have set off the security alarm, but a woman in one of the chairs motioned to me to come over to her and as I approached she said to me, “Are you putting out into the deep?” She had recognized me and said she read my weekly column. We never know when or where we might be asked to put out into the deep. I responded to her that I was indeed going on retreat and hopefully I would deepen my spiritual awareness of the Lord’s call to me. I wished her well on her trip to Florida. As a recent widow, she asked for my prayers to cope with a new life that now would be hers.

The twists and turns of life always challenge us to put out into the deep and learn from our past experiences.

Diocese Sets Four Child Protection Workshops

Close to 750 clergy, Religious, and laity have registered to attend “VIRTUS: Protecting God’s Children” awareness training workshops set for Feb. 10 and 11 at sites in Douglaston and Bay Ridge.

The sessions are designed to educate adults about how abusers groom potential victims and their families, ways to prevent abuse and methods for properly reporting suspicions of abuse, said Sister Jane S. Seiden, C.N.D., Vice Chancellor. She chairs the Diocesan Committee on Education Toward Awareness and Prevention of Sexual Abuse.

Dr. Paul J. Aichon, who has led “Protecting God’s Children” workshops in a number of U.S. dioceses, will conduct the sessions.

Two workshops will be offered at the Immaculate Conception Center, Douglaston, Feb. 10 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and from 6:30 to 10 p.m. Sister Jane said 315 have registered for the afternoon session, making it virtually filled, and 141 are enrolled in the evening program.

On Feb. 11, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Basilica in Bay Ridge will host two sessions, one from 8:30 a.m. till noon and the other from 1 to 4:30 p.m. Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio is among the 121 persons registered for the morning session and 96 are enrolled in the afternoon program.

Persons seeking to attend a workshop must register online on the VIRTUS Web site at www.virtus.org. Anyone who encounters difficulties in registering online may receive assistance by calling the Office of Human Resources at (718) 495-7002.

The workshops are a response to article 12 of the U.S. bishops’ 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which called for “safe environment” programs that “make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and others in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.”

Last year, 2,530 adults attended workshops conducted in the Diocese, Sister Jane said. Seven sessions sponsored by the Diocesan committee between February and October drew 1,800 participants, including pastors, principals, parish staffs and teachers.

Programs conducted by Catholic Charities, which reached 730 persons, used a model developed by Fordham University that was augmented by VIRTUS materials.

Representatives of VIRTUS also held two two-and-a-half-day facilitators training workshops that prepared 28 persons in the diocese to give safe environment sessions in parishes, clusters of parishes and other groups.

In a letter sent to clergy this month, Bishop DiMarzio said VIRTUS training was required for all priests, deacons, teachers, employees, volunteers and “all who have regular contact with minors.”

The VIRTUS program was created by the National Catholic Risk Retention Group in Locke, Ill., “to protect children and others who interact with the Church by preventing wrongdoing and promoting best management practices,” according to Jack McCallum, who directs VIRTUS’s programs and services.

Utah Churches Are Declared Gun-Free Zones

SALT LAKE CITY (CNS) — Salt Lake City’s Catholic bishop and more than 30 other religious leaders have told Utah government officials it is not the state’s place to make policy for churches, synagogues, mosques, temples or the ward houses of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — even when it comes to a law allowing people to carry concealed weapons.

At a December press conference, Bishop George H. Niederauer and other religious leaders responded to a new state requirement that religious communities must register with a state agency if they intend to keep their houses of worship free from the intrusion of weapons.

A joint statement from the religious leaders said, “Anyone who attends one of our services carrying a concealed weapon under any law allowing them to do so will be asked to leave our property and return only after safely storing that weapon elsewhere.”

Bishop DiMarzio’s Calendar

Sunday, Feb. 1, 1 p.m., Mass, St. Brigid Church, Brooklyn.

Monday, Feb. 2 — Catholic Schools Week school visits, Queens South Vicariate: 9 a.m., St. Camillus, Rockaway Park; 10 a.m., St. Virgilius, Broad Channel; 11 a.m., Our Lady of Grace, Howard Beach.

6 p.m., Diocesan Pastoral Council meeting, 510 Prospect Park West.

Tuesday, Feb. 3 — Catholic Schools Week school visits, Brooklyn East Vicariate: 9 a.m., Mary Queen of Heaven, Mill Basin; 10 a.m., Our Lady of Miracles, Canarsie; 11 a.m., St. Therese of Lisieux, East Flatbush.

6 p.m., Brooklyn Borough President reception to welcome Bishop, Borough Hall.

Wednesday, Feb. 4 — 3 p.m., Vicariate celebration, 7:30 p.m. Mass, St. James Cathedral Basilica.

Thursday, Feb. 5 — 3 p.m., Vicariate celebration, 7:30 p.m., Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Brooklyn.

Friday, Feb. 6 — 12 p.m., Futures in Education “Principal for a Day” luncheon, Brooklyn.

Saturday, Feb. 7, 11 a.m., Confirmation, St. Matthias Church, Ridgewood.

5:30 p.m., Mass, Immaculate Conception Church, Jamaica.