

Feast of St. Andrew
November 30, 2005

Dear People of God,

In light of the progress that has been made, thanks to the commitment of so many individuals, we are ready to extend the efforts to create a safer culture for all God's children. Therefore, the Diocese of Tyler is continuing to develop its Safe Environment Program.

Every time we hear of persons being abused in any way, shape, or form, our hearts go out to them, and our minds turn to ponder: "Could this happen to me or my family or my friends?" We all desire a "safe environment" for ourselves and for our loved ones. As a Church in East Texas we have done much to create a safe environment in all our parishes, missions, and institutions. Since the implementation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002, we have trained 3678 adults not only about our policies, but more importantly about concrete steps to break the cycle of abuse. Each of our Catholic schools already has a safe environment curriculum as a formal part of its ministry of education. Many of the public schools in our area provide good programs as well. So too the Boy Scouts have long supported some excellent programs.

We teach first and most powerfully by what we do. Our implementation of the Code of Ethics for Church Personnel has been well received. It has become for many not merely an obligation but a perspective of how they approach not only their work for the Church, but their interactions with people in all areas of their lives. Our efforts have been effective. The Diocese of Tyler training has helped to protect people of all ages. Many parents and guardians are better able to safeguard their children as a direct result of their training and commitment.

Many people are aware of the Promoter of Justice, Rev. Gavin Vaverek, who can be readily contacted by anyone whether they have been abused themselves, or have knowledge of possible abuse, or even have concerns about the appropriateness of the conduct of someone who works for the Church or who volunteers in the activities of the Church. The Promoter of Justice can be reached by calling (903) 266-2159 or email at promoter@dioceseoftyler.org. Each parish has also appointed a Parish Contact Person for Ethics and Integrity. This person serves as a resource to the local community and helps assure compliance with the Ethics and Integrity Policy of the diocese. Generally the Parish Contact Person is a member of the Pastoral Council who can be contacted through the local parish office or through the Promoter of Justice. Training has also made people more aware of their obligations under state law in Texas to report suspected abuse or neglect of a minor or a vulnerable adult to civil authorities.

Thankfully, we are starting to create a new culture where abuse of anyone is simply not tolerated, and where people know what steps to take if there is concern about the possibility of abuse. In fact, in at least four cases children have received help from the state Child Protective Services as a direct result of action taken by people with an ACS (Acceptance Certificate of Service issued by the Diocese of Tyler). I feel we can be pleased with our efforts to make the church environment a safer place for all God's children. We are committed to continuing these important efforts, for it takes many years to develop a culture of life.

The Diocese of Tyler is committed to additional efforts aimed at raising the consciousness and knowledge of all parents and guardians as to how they can help their children and families be safer from abuse of all types. The diocese will annually support significant activity for April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Furthermore, in January and September we will designate a weekend for a major message, focusing on abuse prevention and reinforcing the Code of Ethics for Church Personnel in the Diocese of Tyler. These efforts will be in all parishes, missions and Catholic programs and institutions.

In each parish, the priest and the Parish Contact Person for Ethics and Integrity will work with the Pastoral Council to insure that formation opportunities are available for all adults in the community. They will also actively encourage parents and guardians to avail themselves of these resources. Furthermore, they will see to it that young people are made aware of appropriate ways to insure their safety and what they can do if they or a friend is in a situation that is threatening or uncomfortable.

The Diocese will also post on the website resources that families might use in their own homes to provide more supplemental activities for their children of various ages. And we will increase attention to the provisions of the Code of Ethics and our policy and guidelines for Ethics and Integrity.

In closing, I ask every adult to cooperate in creating a safe environment for all God's children. Every human person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity as befits the sacred dignity of the human person. May God bless you, your families, and your parish community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alvaro Corrada S.J." with a cross symbol to the left of the name.

Most Reverend Alvaro Corrada, S.J.
Bishop of Tyler