

Office of Safe Environment Announcement – Online VIRTUS® Sessions as Additional Resource

The Office of Safe Environment of the Diocese of Green Bay has been engaged in a planful pilot of the online version of the **VIRTUS® Protecting God's Children** training for the past 18+ months. Interest in the online training option was sparked by a history of suggestions by participants in the classroom version that has been employed since 2004. There was also a demonstrated need for an option that provided more timely training, especially in schools, and an option that would be more convenient for employees and volunteers in more rural areas where live sessions are more limited in number and location. The program was been evaluated initially by a select group of Curia employees who endorsed moving ahead with the pilot.

Since our current **VIRTUS®** database is set up by location, it allowed us to select certain specific locations to field test the product. The first location selected was Camp Tekakwitha for the 2018 season because the Camp is relatively small, they hire seasonal employees from all over the country, and most employees tend to be college students or recent graduates who are familiar with working online. One immediate advantage noted was that all employees could actually complete the training at home and come prepared to be with youth from their first day of work. Previously Safe Environment training was a pinch point in new hire orientation as there was little time between first day of work and the arrival of the first youth. Camp Director Rebecca Sievers worked with Safe Environment to implement an end of year evaluation to help measure the effectiveness of the training. The Camp Tekakwitha pilot was a success and the location continues to utilize the online training.

The second site selected to expand the pilot was Mount Tabor Retreat Center for the 2018-2019 season. Most of the employee population fit the same profile as Camp Tekakwitha, especially the SPIRITUS Missionaries; however, there are additional year round support employees at the location. Results at Mount Tabor again were successful and the location continues to utilize the online training.

The third location selected was "GRACE Employees Only". As one of the original purposes of the online training was to offer a resource to the schools it was important to test it in a school environment. GRACE also provided the opportunity to test the product in a much larger environment as they employ several hundred employees. Lastly the GRACE model of centralized hiring of all system employees while the individual schools handle the volunteers allowed for ability to control access to the online training. That pilot has also been successful and "GRACE Employees Only" location continues to utilize the online training.

Earlier this year, with the endorsement of the three field locations involved in the pilot permission was sought and received of Bishop Ricken to add the online version as an option for providing Safe Environment awareness training required by the ***Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People***.

The intent was to communicate and implement the online training later this spring so that locations had the additional online resource to help address any non-compliance found in the annual ***Charter*** audit ahead of the June 30th end of the audit period. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has led to a temporary halt in offering the classroom session option. We do not want to sacrifice Safe Environment awareness

training and compliance until classroom sessions can resume. Therefore a decision has been made to implement the online option effective April 1, 2020.

It is important to appreciate that the classroom version will continue to be offered and people will have a choice of presentation that works best for their situation. We will continue to monitor participant response and training impact going forward.