

It is the policy of the Diocese of Charleston and of Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish and School that every employee and adult volunteer (18 and older) who is deemed to have access to children (17 and younger) will meet the Safe Environment requirements stated below before being employed or volunteering.

That means:

- Every employee, and
- Every adult volunteer, parishioner and non-parishioner, who volunteers in the school or the parish, even with limited interaction with children, and
- Every adult volunteer who chaperones a group of children on a field trip, youth event, overnight retreat and other activities

Why you need to take this session?

The Diocese of Charleston requires that adults who interact with children to be aware of how to protect children. The VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children* program for adults is a two to three hour live awareness session instructing adults of the Parish and School that to protect children they must have continuous awareness and vigilance. This session helps adults understand the signs of child sexual abuse, the means by which offenders commit abuse and five empowerment steps one can use to prevent child sexual abuse.

What do you need to do?

Begin the process now.

1. Go to [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org) website. You will need to submit a username and password. Select a session. Register for the session.
2. Pick up the employee or volunteer packet of materials from the Parish or School office.
3. Read and retain the booklet *The Diocese of Charleston, Policy Concerning Allegations of Sexual Misconduct or Abuse of a Minor by Church Personnel*.
4. ATTEND the VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children* session.
5. Complete either a Diocese of Charleston Volunteer Application form or a Diocese of Charleston Application for Employment.
6. Complete the Background Screening Basic Data Form to be submitted to the Office of Protection Services for the Diocese of Charleston
7. SIGN the Acknowledgement of the Receipt of the Policy, page 65 in the booklet.
8. SIGN the Code of Conduct, page 61 in the booklet.
9. SIGN the Diocesan Policy regarding Confidentiality and Abiding by Catholic Principles
10. Return items 5-9 to the Parish or School office
11. Active volunteers and employees will have their background screening reviewed by the Diocese every five years. Those who have credit and driving authorization will have to renew their screening applications every five years to continue those activities.

What if you have already taken a class that sounds just like *VIRTUS Protecting God's Children*?

You probably have done so if you are involved with children in other churches, scouting, or in youth sports. But, it is still required by the Diocese of Charleston that you participate in the *VIRTUS Protecting God's Children* program and its background screening regardless of your previous classes or professional training.

What is done to instruct our Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish and School children?

Each year the Diocese of Charleston and our parish and school faith formation programs are required to present age-appropriate lessons called "Teaching Touching Safety" to our children. Prior to the presentation of the "Teaching Touching Safety" lessons, parents are sent a packet of information for Teaching Touching Safety themselves in the home. Parents also receive a copy of the lesson plan that the teacher will use in the classroom and a form which they may sign and return if they choose to opt their child out of the lesson.

Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish and School recognize that parents are the first and most important teachers of their children.

For more information or answers to your questions  
please feel free to contact:

Mrs. Karen E. Henry, Parish Safe Environment Coordinator  
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or

Mrs. Marguerite B. Wertz, School Safe Environment Coordinator  
At 803-649-2071 or [pwertz@stmaryschoolaiken.com](mailto:pwertz@stmaryschoolaiken.com)