



May 31, 2012

Dear Visitor,

Peace and all good things!

Welcome to this website established for the purpose of creating safe environments for the youth of the Diocese of Savannah.

The establishment of the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People in September 2007 was the most visible action in a process now over 25 years old whereby this diocese took specific steps to address the issue of child protection.

The first diocesan policy specifically addressing sexual abuse was put in place in 1985. A Review Board to advise the Bishop in these matters has been in place since 1995. Our current policy, an enhancement of the previous policy, dates to May 2003 and is a direct result of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

Protecting our children is a top priority. Whether in our schools, parishes, or outreach ministries, the Diocese of Savannah is attempting to be vigilant in establishing and enforcing procedures that diminish dangers facing the youngest members of the diocesan family. Our efforts are twofold: controlled access and education.

Our controlled access policy requires that all priests, deacons, seminarians and religious undergo a criminal background check (renewable every five years). The same is required for all full-time employees, part-time employees, and volunteers whose ministry involves interaction with minors.

Our education program requires that all aforementioned parties attend a diocesan awareness session entitled "*Protecting God's Children*". Having attended this session individuals must register on-line attesting to their attendance. Our education program also requires all employees and volunteers of the diocese, regardless of whether their duties entail interaction with youth, to read and familiarize themselves with the Diocesan *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*, and sign an affidavit attesting to this fact.

Even with these safeguards there are no guarantees. Allegations which have surfaced of past crimes against children pain me deeply. I encourage any person who may have been abused by an employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Savannah to please come forward so the Church can

extend spiritual, pastoral and professional counseling or referral, if required. There is a toll free hotline number, 888-357-5330, for reporting instances of sexual abuse of minors by diocesan personnel.

I also encourage all who are reading this letter to please take the time to visit the various resources and information links on this website. To have an effective safe environment program requires the efforts of our entire diocesan family.

I continue to offer my prayers to all who may have been victimized in the past, and to all those involved in this necessary undertaking to prevent future victimization.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.

Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.
Bishop of Savannah