



April 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our children are God's great gift to us. Each April, we observe National Child Abuse Prevention Month which serves as a reminder that we must continue the ongoing work of raising awareness while also recommitting ourselves to protecting our children who are so vulnerable. At the same time, we also renew our commitment to assist survivors of abuse, especially at the hands of a clergy member, as they seek healing and peace.

One case of abuse is too many, yet the National Children's Alliance reports that more than 550,000 children in the United States are known to have been abused in recent years. The majority of that abuse, 76%, was at the hands of a trusted adult, like a parent or guardian.¹ These staggering numbers remind us of the need for vigilance and compassion; these are real lives, real families shattered by trauma, and the often-unseen real scars that last a lifetime. Beyond immediate harm, abuse contributes to long-term challenges, including mental health issues, substance abuse, and difficulties in establishing relationships. For every child affected, an additional circle of family and community endures silent suffering, perpetuating cycles of trauma across generations.

During a meeting for "The Protection of Minors in the Church," Pope Francis said, "The Church's aim will thus be to hear, watch over, protect and care for abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are. To achieve that goal, the Church must rise above the ideological disputes and journalistic practices that often exploit, for various interests, the very tragedy experienced by the little ones."² We need to protect every child as if he or she is a member of our own family.

Regrettably, our own Diocese has had experiences of trusted adults who engaged in these sinful acts. We will never stop being vigilant to ensure that, as much as possible, all children and vulnerable adults in our care are protected. Assuring that our parishes and institutions are truly safe environments for children has been, and must *always* be, a principal priority for our Diocese. So, not only during the month of April, but throughout the year, we renew our resolve to do all that we can to prevent child abuse.

As Bishop, I am proud to continue the shared efforts of a multifaceted Diocesan-wide strategy aimed at prevention, support, and healing. I can confidently report that we have implemented robust training programs for our clergy and lay leaders, educating them about the signs of abuse and the critical steps to take to address it, and, as indicated, report it appropriately to law enforcement. As of 2024, 15,346 students enrolled in Catholic schools in the Diocese or in parish religious education programs have received the VIRTUS Safe Environment training; 146 priests, along with 73 permanent deacons and 27 candidates for ordination (seminarians and candidates for the permanent diaconate) have completed background checks

¹ National Children's Alliance, "National Statistics on Child Abuse," *National Children's Alliance*, <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/media-room/national-statistics-on-child-abuse/> (accessed March 24, 2025).

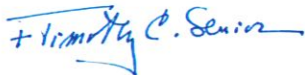
² Francis, "Meeting 'The Protection of Minors in the Church,'" Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.html (accessed March 24, 2025).

and safe environment training; 866 educators and administrators in Diocesan Catholic schools, 1,715 employees of the Diocese or its parishes across fifteen counties, and 8,438 volunteers at schools, parishes and Diocesan facilities have received training on how to keep children safe; and additional, local audits on the parish and school level to ensure safe environment compliance were implemented. Our Office for Child and Youth Protection also worked to develop new codes of conduct for our clergy, staff, and volunteers while also continuing the process of making updates to our Youth Protection Policy.

May this month be a catalyst that unites us in our continuing mission to dismantle the cycle of abuse through awareness, education, and unwavering support. Please join me in praying for and extending compassion to survivors. All of God's children are valued members of the Church who need and deserve the Catholic community's empathy, care, and, above all, protection. May we reaffirm our commitment to safeguarding our children, empowering families, and creating safe environments where everyone can flourish.

May God bless our work to do all we can to protect every child, and to prevent child abuse, especially for those entrusted to our care. Pray also that all those who have been abused, or affected by it, may find healing and peace. May Mary, the Mother of God and our mother, pray for us and for the success of our efforts to ensure that all children will be safe and all survivors will be healed.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Timothy C. Senior". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg

The Diocese of Harrisburg encourages anyone aware of misconduct or abuse by any person affiliated with the Diocese to report it to Child Line at 1-800-932-0313, to contact local law enforcement and to contact the Diocese by calling 1-800-626-1608.