

# From Deacon Fred

Dear Friends,

Over the past several weeks, we have kept a watchful eye on the developments in the abuse crisis in our Catholic Church. Our own Archbishop Lori aptly identified the continuing news as “rightly a cause for anger, disillusion and pain among many in our Church.” I wholeheartedly agree with his next statement: “These feelings toward the Church must be met with **more than prayers and promises. They must also be met with action by all** with responsibility for ensuring the safety of children and others in our care.” If you have taken the opportunity to visit our website you will find actions are taking place and planning is moving forward in a positive manner.

It has come to light here at St. Bernadette that many parishioners do not know what we do here to fulfill our responsibility to protect the vulnerable among us. Since the very founding of our parish, the clergy, parish leaders, and parishioners have valued and protected the dignity of all persons. In early 2002, the Boston Globe released their story on the abuses in the Boston Archdiocese. In response, the United States’ bishops gathered in Dallas to begin formulating a plan as to how to address the issue. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, a comprehensive set of procedures, was established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Dallas in June of 2002 to ensure dioceses throughout the United States are appropriately addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy and others. The Charter also includes guidelines for preventing future acts of abuse and for bringing about reconciliation and healing of victims and survivors of abuse.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore, to concur with the guidelines, implemented the program STAND. This is not an acronym; it literally calls us to STAND for the Protection of Children and Youth! From the start, STAND has required training, screening, and ongoing oversight, updated throughout the decades since its initiation. All Archdiocesan schools and parishes, including St. Bernadette, must adhere to the requirements of STAND, now assisted by the Virtus database, criminal history, and training system.

## **What does STAND entail?**

**All adult volunteers with substantial contact with young people** (in other words, anyone with supervisory responsibilities over anyone age 17 and below) must first:

- Pass an independent criminal background screening (*re-screened every 5 years or less*)
- Submit three personal references, which are then independently verified and kept on file with the screening coordinator
- Complete formal Archdiocesan training in the prevention of and (if needed) response to abuse or neglect of children or teens (*re-trained every 5 years or less*)
- Read and assent to the Archdiocese’s *Statement of Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth* and *Code of Conduct for Church Personnel of the Archdiocese*
- Receive ongoing training in their ministry context(s) with the appropriate pastoral staff

Additionally, **parish, school, and Archdiocesan paid staff** must pass a state-mandated CJIS/fingerprint record check and participate in ongoing continuing education regarding pastoral care, boundaries, ministry ethics, and mandated reporting as appropriate to their job responsibilities.

**Teenage volunteers age 14-17** complete the age-appropriate Worthy of the Call training, as well as adapted paperwork commensurate with the adult expectations. Once 18, these volunteers must meet the same training and background check standards as other adults.

**Any volunteer (a minimum 21 years old) who drives minors in their capacity as a parish volunteer** must first pass a driving record check. Minors are not permitted to drive for parish events.

In addition to the STAND program, the following safeguards are in place to insure the safety of all, especially our children, during the ongoing ministries in our parish:

- **All paid and volunteer ministers are selected based on their gifts, including a pastoral sensitivity to the groups with which they minister.** At the heart of all ministry is the call to ministry, which is guided by the Holy Spirit. It is our job as a parish community to help one another discern how God is calling us to serve, and to equip one another for healthy ministry. Heads of ministries and parish staff members ensure that all ministers are properly prepared for their responsibilities, regardless of whether those responsibilities necessitate STAND clearance.
- At **Sunday morning faith formation**, our young children are to be checked into and out of their classrooms by their parents. In collaboration with the custodial staff at Spalding (who are STAND cleared, as Archdiocesan Catholic school employees), we ensure that unlocked doors are monitored. Spalding's door buzzer system assists us in maintaining security of locked doors.
- At **Sunday evening faith formation**, all doors are secured during class times to ensure that only youth and adults who belong there have access to the building. Teens are to enter and exit the building independently of their parents, so that we can ensure that only cleared adults are present within the building. The coordinator is available to families at drop off and pick up, and latecomers must check in at a central location in order to be admitted to the building.
- In collaboration with our ushers and greeters, parents and all STAND cleared volunteers are encouraged to **proactively safeguard the safety of all at Mass and other parish events** (particularly in and around the restroom and parking lot areas) in age-appropriate ways. Any concerns should be promptly shared with parish staff.

## What Can You Do?

- **Become a STAND-cleared volunteer.** Even if you don't currently minister with people under 18, the more well-trained adults we have looking out for our children and youth, the safer our environment will be! Contact our Screening Coordinator, Rena Black, to get started. ([renablack@stbernadette.org](mailto:renablack@stbernadette.org) or 410-969-2781).
- **Explore appropriate boundaries.** Not sure how to be friendly to families with children or teenagers without crossing a line? We are happy to share some strategies for connecting!
- **Familiarize yourself with the process for reporting.** Any information concerning child abuse should be reported to the appropriate state authorities pursuant to state law. The Archdiocese of Baltimore complies with Maryland laws requiring reporting suspected child abuse to civil authorities. **Under Maryland law any person who has reason to believe a child has been subjected to abuse must report the suspected abuse to civil authorities, even if the potential victim is now over 18 years old and even in cases where the alleged perpetrator is deceased.** If someone associated with the Church, including clergy, employees, or volunteers in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, is suspected of abuse, then the suspected abuse must *also* be reported to the Archdiocese's Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP) at 410-547-5348 or the Victims Assistance Hotline at 1-866-417-7469.
- **Visit our parish website's response page,** <http://stbernadette.org/abuse/abuse.htm>, to keep well-informed of developments and resources as they become available.
- **Communicate with us** about your experiences, skills, and suggestions around safe environments. We want to hear from you!
- **Pray for victims, survivors, family members, and all affected by abuse.** Prayer without action is dead, but action without prayer risks a loss of hope. If we keep the cross of Christ before us, we can be who we are called to be: people of justice, healing, and hope!

One in His Peace,

*Deacon Fred*