



DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

• P.O. Box 230, Wheeling, WV 26003 •

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Enacts New Protocols to Enhance Safe Environment Program

WHEELING—Expanding the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston’s Safe Environment Program, Bishop Mark Brennan is requiring additional protocols to increase safety and reduce risk in Catholic schools and parishes.

In a February 20 letter to all pastors, administrators, and principals of Catholic schools, Bishop Brennan announced he is expanding the requirement of fingerprinting as part of the Diocese’s background check process, and has engaged Corporate Security and Investigations (CSI) of Pennsylvania as the third-party service provider that will conduct Safe Environment spot checks, site assessments, and training.

“Today I write to you with hope and confidence that the efforts to establish a culture of safety and awareness in our diocese continue to move forward in significant ways,” the bishop says in his letter.

Fingerprinting is now required of not only the bishop himself but of all priests and deacons, all seminarians, all Catholic school principals, teachers, staff and certain volunteers, as well as chancery staff. Fingerprints will be submitted to, and housed within the FBI, as part of the background check process.

“The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Catholic Schools are eager to be a part of the fingerprinting initiative,” said Catholic Schools Superintendent Mary Ann Deschaine. “We continue to work on providing opportunities to enhance our traditions of excellence in our Catholic schools. Participating in this fingerprinting initiative is the logical next step in improving our already rigorous Safe Environment policies.”

Fingerprint records will not be kept by schools or the diocese.

Bishop Brennan further explained that CSI is an organization comprised of experienced professionals from law-enforcement, public safety, academia, and the private sector, who specialize in various services focused upon safety.

Beginning this year, CSI representatives will be visiting parishes and schools to perform more frequent and regular spot checks to ensure compliance, accuracy, and consistency at the local level.

CSI experts will also assess and evaluate site security and offer recommendations to enhance the physical safety of people, buildings, and properties. The preliminary plan is to conduct site assessments by regions coupling them with fingerprinting and safe environment spot checks. CSI representatives will also review and offer suggestions for site security plans that parishes or schools already have in place.

The diocese, through CSI experts, and Diocesan counsel, will also offer training on safety, de-escalation, and harassment of professional staff.

Bryan Minor, director of Diocesan Administrative Services and Safe Environment Process administrator, said that the Office of Safe Environment welcomes this additional measure that will contribute to the safety of young people and peace of mind of parents and educators. "Our school children and our parishioners are our greatest gifts and our greatest resources," Minor said. "Ensuring their safety is an ongoing process that involves collaboration and cooperation on many fronts. There are many good, hard-working people throughout our diocese at the parish and school levels who are committed to helping the diocese create safe environments to worship and learn. Their efforts are deeply appreciated. These new measures that the diocese is undertaking illustrate Bishop Brennan's leadership toward creating a culture of safety throughout West Virginia." Minor said the Safe Environment Office looks forward to working with parishes, schools, clergy, and seminarians throughout the diocese to implement these additional protocols.

The Office of Safe Environment strives to raise awareness and reduce risk throughout the diocese, Minor said, noting that the Safe Environment process is mandatory for employees and volunteers who work directly or indirectly with children.

In addition to the new protocols to the Safe Environment Program, Bishop Brennan notes that the Diocese has worked for several months on the implementation of the third-party reporting system known as Ethics Point, which will soon be incorporated; the expansion of various lay boards and implementation policies designed to provide necessary stewardship of church resources; the establishment of a victims assistance fund, which was recently created; and the continuation of encouraging the reporting of abuse to civil authorities first and foremost.

"It is my sincerest hope that the implementation of these measures, coupled with those upon which we already have embarked, will continue to illustrate our commitment to growing the culture of safety we all want to provide," stated Bishop Brennan.

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