

# **Archbishop's Mission Statement for the Sexual Abuse Awareness Program for the Archdiocese of Atlanta**

*“Here, then, is the message we heard from Him [Christ] and announce to you: that God is light; and in Him there is no darkness . . . if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another . . .” (1 John 1:5-7).*

My mission is to protect children and vulnerable individuals in the Archdiocese of Atlanta from sexual abuse, and to provide in a responsible way a charitable and healing response to those who have suffered such abuse.

In pursuing this mission, I and those working with me, will seek to:

- Respond promptly and effectively to allegations of such sexual abuse,
- Cooperate with civil authorities in reporting or investigations,
- Ensure that those who do minister in the name of the Church will protect the dignity and integrity of the individuals assigned to their care and/or formation,
- Communicate throughout the Archdiocese of Atlanta the continued efforts of the Church to adhere to this mission,
- Suspend from ministry any cleric, employee, or volunteer against whom credible allegations of sexual abuse have been made, and permanently remove such person if the allegation is found to be actionable,
- Provide for a means of accountability for the future by working with the local Lay Advisory Board.

## **Our Commitment to Parents**

Article 12 of the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (June 2002) requires dioceses to establish “safe environment” programs and to “cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children.” This archdiocese is indeed engaged in this process. It is my belief that we can help raise the awareness of this issue, in order to both discourage it and recognize it as quickly as possible. We will continue to be involved in this education process in a number of forums, using a variety of methods.

As for the education of our children the Church teaches that “*The role of parents in education* is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2221 (emphasis in original).

Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*, no. 37, states that “[sex education, which is the basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them.” The Holy Father has also noted that “other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities *in the name of the parents, with their consent*, and, to a certain degree, *with their authorization*.” *Letter to Families (Gratissimam Sane)*, no. 16.

Finally, the Pontifical Council for the Family has made specific recommendations to parents and educators about being sensitive to the timing of introducing children and young people to information related to human sexuality. *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family*, nos. 124 – 127 (1995). In these recommendations, the Council specifically declared:

- “*Sexual perversions* that are relatively rare should not be dealt with except through individual counseling, as the parents’ response to genuine problems.” (No. 125 (c));
- “No material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people at any age, individually or in a group.” (No. 126); and
- “[*Methods that abuse sex education* [include]: (a) very ‘dramatized’ representation, mime, or ‘role playing’ which depicts genital or erotic matters, (b) making drawings, charts, or models, etc., of this nature, (c) seeking personal information about sexual questions or asking that family information be divulged, (d) oral or written exams about genital or erotic questions.”

The Council concludes that “[the normal and fundamental method [of education on human sexuality] ... is *personal dialog between parents and their children*, that is *individual formation within the family circle*.” (No. 129)

Thus, in communion with Church teaching and affirming the recommendations of the Pontifical Council for the Family, the precepts outlined above will be reflected in meeting the needs of educating our children on this important issue.

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Archbishop of Atlanta