

## A Statement from Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of Arlington, on Child Abuse Prevention Month

*April 2021*

During National Child Abuse Prevention Month, we draw special attention to the extraordinary responsibility we have to protect children entrusted to our care.

We know this past year has been particularly difficult for many families, and, sadly, with the increase in pressures and heightened anxiety many are experiencing, children have been subjected to unprecedented levels of abuse and neglect. It is also well-known that in the past, Church officials have failed in their duty to protect children from abuse committed by priests. This abhorrent reality has inspired the Church to make drastic changes in the way it operates to ensure young people are guarded appropriately. Likewise, all people of good will must work together to ensure each and every child is valued and protected.

The Diocese of Arlington continues to work diligently to protect children from abuse in any form and in all circumstances and maintains a zero-tolerance policy for anyone credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor. We remain fully committed to training our clergy, staff and volunteers to identify and report any suspected instances of abuse. Our Office of Child Protection and Victim Assistance works with parish staff to ensure training and prevention are followed throughout our parishes and schools.

I am filled with gratitude for the exceptional staff and volunteers in our diocese, parishes and schools for their dedication and commitment to protect children from any instances of abuse.

During this month, we must recognize that the devastating impact of child abuse is lifelong, and therefore we should connect with victims and learn more about what they need to find healing and peace. This process begins by listening compassionately to their stories. We must walk with them and be willing to accompany them on their journey of healing. And it must be done on *their* time. Committed and united, we can reduce child abuse and help victims find healing in Christ.

We ask that Our Lord protect each child entrusted to our care, that he brings peace to families experiencing hardship, and that he grants us a renewed sense awe for the wonderful gift of each child.

*The Diocese encourages anyone aware of misconduct or abuse by any person affiliated with the Diocese to report it to local law enforcement and contact the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator at (703) 841-2530.*