The Office for the Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults (OPCVA) thanks you for your continued commitment to the safety and well-being of our children and most vulnerable amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, which has led to unparalleled shifts in our daily lives, from the way we live out our faith to social norms that we are all trying to comprehend and navigate. As we remain united in prayer, we pray for the health and safety of you and your loved ones as the COVID-19 pandemic affects the world around us on a daily basis.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to share a sensitive reminder as it relates to our current reality. Research and experts alike warn that times of heightened stress and isolation can trigger abuse disclosures or lead to victim/survivors requiring more care and support. Furthermore, children are at a greater risk for abuse and neglect amid the COVID-19 pandemic due to the dangers of isolation, inadequate or non-existent childcare, and increased parental stress triggered by growing economic instability and housing insecurity, which will continue to be exasperated under current circumstances.

Now is the time to remain vigilant in order to protect our youth and so many vulnerable populations. The concerns noted above underscore the need to be able to recognize abuse, especially in our parish and school communities, as well as the ability to report instances or suspicions of abuse to both the diocese and civil authorities. Services critical to children's safety, and victim/survivor’s well-being must continue to be made available despite the outbreak, and we all play a crucial role in this effort in our local communities.

As we look towards April and the blessing of Easter, we remind you that April is also National Child Abuse Prevention Month. This is a vital and meaningful time to highlight the importance of youth protection. Let us join in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ by showing our support for protecting God’s children, through our recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month within our local parish and school communities. To assist you in this effort, we have developed an online toolkit to promote child abuse prevention resources for use by caring individuals and families:

Child Abuse Prevention Website: https://www.dsj.org/april-is-child-abuse-prevention-month/

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your community. As always, if you, your staff or parishioners have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our office without hesitation for further assistance.

Should you need anything, we are currently available to you by email and by phone - and in person, as appropriate, while respecting social distancing. Please be assured of our prayers for you and your families during these trying times.

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