



# DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

April 1, 2021

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Parents and Caregivers of Children and Youth,

The abuse of a child is a tragedy that cries out to heaven. April is **National Child Abuse Prevention Month**, a month dedicated to raising awareness and preventing child abuse. We all have a role in ensuring safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children and young people.

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, fewer mistreated children visit emergency rooms<sup>1</sup>. Yet, the children's injuries are more severe than in the past. One reason for decreased emergency room visits is that children's access to mandated reporters [such as teachers] and other trusted adults [such as catechists] decreased. Children were brought to medical professionals much later than in the past, almost as a last resort.

*See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.* Matthew 10:18

Child abuse and neglect are always tragic and often hidden. Families have experienced isolation, increased stress, and financial challenges, which threaten child safety. Add to this unsupervised children, transient caregivers, online child sexual exploitation and bullying, cancelled school lunch programs, mental health issues in the home, and countless other factors which endanger children. This is a time for us all to recommit our efforts to protect children.

In recent years, the Diocese of Saginaw has provided Safe Environment education in the Catholic schools and religious education programs. This year, I am sharing resources with all families of youth, inviting you to educate your own children and to learn the warning signs of abuse.

The Knights of Columbus have graciously provided free access to the **Protecting Our Children: Guide for Families**,<sup>2</sup> enclosed with this letter. Please take the time to review the **Guide**, talk with your family, report to law enforcement if you suspect abuse or neglect, pray for each child's protection, and consider how you may strengthen your own or another family to foster the great childhood all children deserve.

Sincerely in the peace and joy of Christ,

*+ Robert D. Gruss*

Most Reverend Robert D. Gruss  
Bishop of Saginaw

<sup>1</sup> *Trends in U.S. Emergency Department Visits Related to Suspected or Confirmed Child Abuse and Neglect Among Children and Adolescents Aged <18 Years Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 2019–September 2020*, December 11, 2020, found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6949a1.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Additional Knights of Columbus resources include videos, such as *Responding to Boundary Violations* and *Protecting Your Marriage*: <https://www.kofc.org/en/safe-environment-program/index.html>.