



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

KEEPING THE PROMISE

The Archeparchy of Pittsburgh is joining Catholic dioceses and eparchies nationwide in promoting Child Abuse Awareness Month this April. Plans call for raising awareness through special prayers during Sunday Masses, diocesan and parish lectures, and other educational activities.

Child Abuse Awareness is a major initiative of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB). As a result an estimated 1.6 millions persons have undergone background checks; 1.8 million priests, deacons, candidates for ordination, educators, employees and volunteers have gone through safe environment programs and approximately 6 million children in parish school and religious education programs have received age-

appropriate instruction in this area nationwide.

The diocesan/eparchial and parish efforts were urged by the U.S. bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People. The USCCB's Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection developed educational materials, resources, prayer cards and other materials for use.

"We can never rest when it comes to protecting children and teenagers," said Bishop Gregory Aymond, Committee chairman. "The prevalence of child abuse in our society calls for vigilance of parents, pastors, teachers, indeed, all responsible adults. Child Abuse Prevention Month deserves our attention in both prayer and action."

Available materials include "DidYouKnow" announcements

developed by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for weekly parish bulletins. One announcement highlights the prevalence of child abuse in society and reports that "an estimated 9.6 percent of all school children will be molested by an educator or an employee of a school between kindergarten and 12th grade." The information comes from Professor David Finkelhor's article, "Current Information on the Scope and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse."

"Our main concern continues to be the protection of children and youth – in our Church, certainly, and in the community-at-large." Metropolitan Basil said. "The dangers are everywhere and the Church must do what it can to help keep children safe." ■

FILING A COMPLAINT OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

It's as simple as a phone call or letter.

Any person who has an allegation of sexual misconduct against a member of the clergy or any other individual working for or on behalf of the Church in the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh should contact the Office of Clergy by writing or calling: 66 Riverview Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA, 15214, 412-231-4000, ext. 22.

The Archeparchy will respond immediately to all allegations of sexual abuse. All allegations of sexual misconduct against minors will be turned over to the proper civil authorities.

In addition to investigating the complaint, the Archeparchy offers individualized pastoral care to victims of abuse that may include counseling, spiritual assistance, and referrals to support groups.

Archeparchy remains vigilant on children, youth protection

MAINTAINING 'SAFE ENVIRONMENTS'

The Archeparchy of Pittsburgh remains vigilant in its efforts to protect the rights and safety of children and youth engaged in activities on the parish, protopresbyterate and Archieparchial levels. The Policy on Sexual Misconduct, revised August 2006, outlines procedures for responding to complaints of sexual abuse by clergy, employees and volunteers in keeping with the U.S. Catholic Church's "Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal." The promise and pledge are inherent in the Universal Norms and Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, revised in June 2005.

The Archeparchy's policy requires all catechists, volunteers and employees who work regularly with children in the active parishes, missions, communities and organizations/departments of the Archeparchy to undergo criminal background checks and

state-specific Child Abuse History clearances. They are obligated as well to participate in a Safe Environment workshop developed and coordinated by the Office of Religious Education (ORE) or similar programs conducted by the Latin Catholic dioceses in outlying regions of the Archeparchy, such as Texas and Louisiana, by agreement with the Archeparchy.

The workshop includes a review of the national Charter, the Archeparchy's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, the Code of Conduct developed by the Archeparchy especially for those working with children and youth and the policy, and process relating to obtaining individual background checks. Catechists also receive lesson plans for "Safe Environment" issues to correspond with the *God With Us* curriculum and a self-check list on creating a safe environment.

In addition, the Archeparchy completed a major educational outreach effort to inform

and raise awareness among all parents and parishioners on these issues. Over 850 individuals attended the Safe Environment Education Program for Parents and the Parish Community presented from August 2007 through January of 2008 – including parishioners, clergy, seminarians and others. Comments on the presentations, provided by more than 20 volunteers working on eight Deanery teams, ranged from "informative," "valuable" and "enlightening" to "well-received" and "a real eye-opener." Sister Agnes Knapik, OSB, Safe Environment Coordinator, directed the ambitious parish education project – the Archeparchy's first locally-based, multi-deanery education effort.

A *Guide to the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh* and a copy of the policy itself are available in PDF - Portable Document Format on the Archeparchy's Web site by going to www.archeparchy.org, and clicking on the Protection of Children link, followed by the link to Available Downloads.

Printed copies of each are also available through the Office of Communications, Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, 66 Riverview Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA, 412-231-4000 ext. 21. ■

