



# April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

## MAINTAINING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

The Archeparchy of Pittsburgh is committed to protecting the rights, safety and dignity of every person, especially children, entrusted to its pastoral care and to implementing fully the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, including programs to increase awareness and promote safe environments for children and youth engaged in activities on the parish, protopresbyteral and Archieparchial levels.

The Archeparchy's policy requires all catechists, volunteers and employees who work regularly with children in the church 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. Contact Sister Agnes Knapik, OSB, Safe Environment Coordinator, at 330-856-1813 for information about the Safe Environment Program.

The Archeparchy's 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 process relating to obtaining individual background checks. Catechists also receive lesson plans for "Safe Environment" issues to correspond with the *God With Us* curriculum, along with a self-check list on creating a safe environment.

*A Guide to the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh and a copy of the policy are available in Portable Document Format (PDF) on the Archeparchy's web site, [www.archeparchy.org](http://www.archeparchy.org). Printed copies of also are available through the Office of Communications, Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, 66 Riverview Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA, 412-231-4000, ext. 21. ■*

## FILING A COMPLAINT OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

**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.

**Sister Agnes Knapik, OSB**  
Safe Environment Coordinator

**Sister Barbara Jean Mihalchick, OSBM**  
Victims Assistance Coordinator



# U.S. bishops' statement voices concern for victims of clergy sexual abuse

POPE BENEDICT THANKED, PRAISED FOR LEADERSHIP

*from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops March 30, 2010 voiced concern for victims of child sexual abuse by clerics and praised Pope Benedict XVI for leadership in dealing with the sin and crime of child sexual abuse.

A statement was issued by the Executive Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

On behalf of the Catholic bishops of the United States, we, the members of the Executive Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, write both to express our deep concern for those harmed by the crime and sin of sexual abuse by clergy and to express our profound gratitude for the assistance that Pope Benedict XVI has given us in our efforts to respond to victims, deal with perpetrators and to create safe environments for children. The recent emergence of more reports of sexual abuse by clergy saddens and angers the Church and causes us shame. If there is anywhere that children should be safe, it should be in their homes and in the Church.

We know from our experience how Pope Benedict is deeply concerned for those who have been harmed by sexual abuse and how he has strengthened the Church's response to victims and supported our efforts to deal with perpetrators. We continue to intensify our efforts to provide safe environments for children in our parishes and schools. Further, we work with others in our communities to address the prevalence of sexual abuse in the larger society.

One of the most touching moments of the Holy Father's visit to the United States in 2008 was his private conversation with victims/survivors at the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington. Pope Benedict heard firsthand how sexual abuse has devastated lives. The Holy Father spoke with each person and provided every one time to speak freely to him. They shared their painful experiences and he listened, often clasping their hands and responding tenderly and reassuringly.

With the support of both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, we bishops have made a vigorous commitment to do everything in our power to prevent abuse from happening to children. We live out this commitment through the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which calls us to respond with compassion to victims/survivors, to work diligently to screen those working with children and young people in the Church, to provide child abuse awareness and prevention education, to report suspected abuse to civil law enforcement, and to account for our efforts to protect children and youth through an external annual national audit.

As we accompany Christ in His passion and death during this Holy Week, we stand with our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI in prayer for the victims of sexual abuse, for the entire Church and for the world.

**Cardinal Francis George, OMI**  
Archbishop of Chicago  
*President*

**Bishop Gerald Kicanas**  
Bishop of Tucson  
*Vice-President*

**Bishop George Murry, SJ**  
Bishop of Youngstown  
*Secretary*

**Archbishop Joseph Kurtz**  
Archbishop of Louisville  
*Treasurer*

**Bishop Arthur Serratelli**  
Bishop of Paterson  
*Elected Member*



# A Safe Environment

PARENTS, CARETAKERS  
HAVE RIGHT TO QUESTION

Churches, schools, and youth organizations must ensure that children and youth who worship, study, or participate in activities sponsored by a parish can do so in the safest and most secure setting possible. Parents and caretakers have the right to ask these institutions if they meet the requirements of the Charter before they allow their children to become involved with them.

## **An effective safe environment program will have the following components:**

- A code of conduct for clergy and for any other paid personnel and volunteers in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people.
- Training for all adults who work with children that consists of:
  - Signs an adult may see in a child who is abused
  - Signs an adult may see in a person who abuses children
  - What actions an adult should take when they believe child abuse of any kind may be occurring
  - The laws and policies regarding the reporting of child abuse
  - A training program for children that includes age-appropriate materials pertaining to personal safety that conforms to Catholic teachings

*Source: [http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/safe\\_environment.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/safe_environment.shtml)*

## **What has the Catholic Church done to effectively respond to sexual abuse by church personnel?**

The Catholic Church has done more to protect children than almost any other organization in the United States. Consider:

- Safe Environment training is taking place in 193 dioceses/eparchies of the country. Over 2 million adults have been trained to recognize the behavior of offenders and what to do about it.
- Background checks are conducted on Church personnel who have contact with children. Over 2 million volunteers and employees; 52,000 clerics; 6,205 candidates for ordination have had their backgrounds evaluated.
- All dioceses/eparchies have Codes of Conduct spelling out what is acceptable behavior. This serves to let people know what can and cannot be done as well as letting others know what behavior can be expected. It encourages the reporting of suspicious behavior.
- All dioceses/eparchies have Victim Assistance Coordinators, assuring victims that they will be heard. In 2009, \$6,536,109 was spent on therapy for the victims of clergy sexual abuse.
- All dioceses/eparchies have Safe Environment Coordinators who assure the ongoing compliance to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.
- Bishops are meeting with victims.
- Dioceses/eparchies have Healing Masses/Liturgies, retreats for victim/survivors and other reconciliation events.
- There is a Zero Tolerance policy on abusers since 2002. If a credible accusation is made against a cleric, they are permanently removed from ministry regardless of how long ago the offense occurred.
- Dioceses/eparchies require intensive background screening as well as psychological testing for those wishing to enter the seminary.

The Catholic Church has worked hard to protect children. Much has done but more needs to be done. Until child sexual abuse is no longer a part of society, the Church will continue its efforts to stop it. ■

*Source: [http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/april\\_cap\\_month\\_2010.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/april_cap_month_2010.shtml)*