

April designated as Child Abuse Awareness month

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The 2010 National Safe Environment Leadership Conference took place in New Orleans from March 14-18, with the theme: "Marching in Line With Our Promise to Prevent Child Abuse, Protect Our Children, and Heal Our Church." The conference provided a message for all of us as Church; we are reminded that one who marches leaves behind an imprint that gives witness to his commitment and action. The imprint must speak to the fact that as Church we are seeking more than a safe environment. We are seeking a faith environment - an environment of nurturing love and faith that affirms the dignity of every human being and gives witness to Christ in its action of preventing, protecting, and healing.

As we seek to right the wrong of sexual abuse, we do it in the spirit of the Gospel message of Christ which is a message of love.

Archbishop Gregory Aymond of the Diocese of New Orleans characterized this as a faith environment where we empower by imparting formation. Although he was speaking to us as Safe Environment Coordinators, Bishop Aymond's comments really apply to all of us as Church because of the various ways we participate in ministry. Through our catechesis and ministry we seek to model behavior that affirms each person as a child of God. By imparting the truths of our faith we are empowering people, especially our children and young people to model Christ and develop healthy



relationships. This formation is preventative, protective, and healing action that we must all be responsible for.

Creating and maintaining this faith environment has its challenges; it is truly faith formation, not sex education. This formation fulfills its task only when it is lived out by the participants as individuals and collectively by the Church as community. We are called as Catholics to respect the dignity of every human being from conception to natural death. Christ said, "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you do for me." Each of us must look out for the needs of others, their healing, safety, support, and respect for their dignity.

Modeling right relationships and listening, responding, and helping those who have been abused or are in danger of being abused brings healing. Our children need our continual effort in this area. They alone cannot protect themselves from abuse; they alone cannot

protect themselves from pornography and the many other dangers to their dignity and healthy growth. As healers in our faith environment, we must acknowledge the task we all share in regard to our children, by virtue of our baptism. To the extent that we are people of prayer, faith, and integrity, we bring about an ever great fulfillment of this task.

If you or someone you know has been sexually exploited by a member of the clergy and you need to talk with someone about abuse, exploitation, or harassment, please contact the Diocese of New Ulm Victim Assistance Coordinator or the Bishop's Delegate in Matters Pertaining to Sexual Misconduct by Clergy, 1400 6th Street North, New Ulm, MN 56073; phone: (507) 359-2966.

Si usted, o alguien a quien conoce, ha sido sexualmente por un clero y necesita hablar con alguien sobre abuso, o acoso sexual, por favor ponerse en contacto con el Coordinador de Asistencia para Víctimas de la Diócesis de New Ulm o con el Delegado del Obispo en Asuntos que Pertencen al Abuso Sexual por Cleros de la Diócesis de New Ulm, 1400 6th Street North, New Ulm, MN 56073; número de teléfono (507) 359-2966.

National audit shows fewest reports of sexual abuse by clerics since 2004; most from decades ago

Washington - The data show that in 2009 there were 398 allegations and 286 offenders reported to dioceses, most from earlier decades. Of the allegations reported in 2009, six allegations (2 percent) involved children under the age of 18 in 2009. About an eighth of the allegations in 2009 (48) were unsubstantiated or determined to be false by the end of the year. Similar declines were found in data from religious orders of men.

Data for the 2009 calendar year were collected by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). It began gathering data on sexual abuse of minors by clerics in 2004 as part of the bishops' annual report on compliance with the *Charter*. The audit report can be found at http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/annual_report2009.shtml

CARA reported that most allegations cited were against pre-teen or teenage males and occurred decades ago.

"For the majority of new allegations (71 percent) brought to dioceses, the abuse began between 1960 and 1984. The most common time period for allegations reported in 2009 was 1975-1979," CARA noted.

Costs paid by dioceses for settlements, therapy for victims, support of offenders, attorney fees and other costs amounted to \$104,439,629 in 2009. Of this total, 53 percent was for settlements with victims and another six percent for

therapy for victims if not already included in settlements.

"Compared to 2008, amounts paid for settlements in 2009 decreased by 83 percent and the amount paid in attorneys' fees declined by three percent," CARA reported. Dioceses also invested more than \$21 million for child protection efforts such as training programs, background checks and salaries for staff, CARA reported.

The annual audit looks at dioceses' compliance with the 17-point *Charter* adopted by the bishops in 2002. Auditors examine steps dioceses take to deal with allegations of abuse, reports of such allegations to civil authorities, and efforts to prevent child sexual abuse.

Virtually all 195 dioceses and eparchies in the United States participated in the audit. Six refused to participate including the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, and five eparchies (Eastern rite dioceses): the Eparchies of St. Peter the Apostle for Chaldeans; Eparchy of Newton for Melkites; Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in New York for Armenian Catholics; Eparchy of St. Josaphat of Parma for Ukrainians; and Eparchy of Our Lady of Deliverance of Newark for Syrians.

The *Charter* compliance audits, which cover the time period July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009. They found 21 cases of allegations against current minors. Nine allegations were against international priests visiting or serving in the United

States. Their countries of origin included Pakistan (1), Nigeria (1), El Salvador (2), Poland (1), Mexico (2), and India (2).

Almost six million, or 96 percent of children in Catholic schools or religious education programs, underwent Safe Environment training, and all but two dioceses that were audited, the Diocese of Baker, Oregon and the Diocese of Fresno, California, were compliant by year's end with this particular provision of the *Charter*. "The bishop of Baker feels it is inappropriate to provide any kind of sex education to any pre-puberty age child," the report noted. It added, however, that the diocese does promote a program to help parents to provide safe environment training for their children. The Fresno Diocese was found non-compliant because it could not provide documentation showing that

one quarter of its children in Catholic school and religious education programs had been trained.

The audit found that background evaluations were performed on over two million priests, deacons, seminarians, educators, employees and volunteers.

(courtesy of USCCB.org)

VIRTUS safe environment training session

April 12 at 6:30 p.m. at Church of St. Anastasia, Hutchinson
May 8 at 9:30 a.m. at St. Anthony Elementary School, New Ulm
May 26 at 7:00 p.m. at Church of Our Lady of the Lakes, Spicer

Contact your local parish/school office for additional upcoming sessions or visit www.dnu.org.