

Archdiocese undergoes annual abuse prevention audit

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The Archdiocese of Los Angeles went through an annual abuse prevention audit this week to ensure the local Church is living up to the standards developed in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis.

The full results from the audit will not be available for months, but the archdiocese has been in full compliance since the audits began in 2005. Dioceses in the United States must prove they're providing care for victims, have established review boards and report all allegations to law enforcement, as was spelled out in the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

"By having an audit, we're living out our commitment to protect children and our commitment to the healing and reconciliation of victims," said Suzanne Healy, coordinator of the archdiocese's Victims Assistance Ministry.

The archdiocese, like other dioceses in the U.S., offers survivors of abuse therapy and maintains a zero-tolerance policy toward abuse.

Another key requirement is education. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has trained more than 1.4 million students about how to detect and report abuse since 2005.

"Education, that's what really makes the difference," said Joan Vienna, coordinator of the Office of Safeguard the Children. "Not only to help children report incidents, but to be proactive about situations that make them uncomfortable."

The Office of Safeguard the Children, with more than 2,000 volunteers, has also educated more than 300,000 adults, maintaining an average of more than 30,000 adults trained a year.

"We do everything we can to protect these children," Vienna said. "They are a priority and our future."

Sister Mary Elizabeth Galt, BVM, chancellor of the archdiocese, said keeping the children safe is a priority shared by the entire Church.

"We really stress reporting," she said. "Even if you're not sure, but you have a sense that something is happening, call the police. They will walk you through it."

Whereas the Church failed at this transparency in the past, Sister Mary Elizabeth said the Church now works closely with the police.

"We are making an effort to train everyone we possibly can, from children to parents," she said. "Every child, created in the image of God, needs to know that no one has a right to touch them. And we teach them to report it if they are."

If you are being abused, have been abused, or know someone who is being abused, you can call Victims Assistance Ministry at (800) 355-2545 for assistance to make a report, or contact Child Protective Services or your local law enforcement agency. In an emergency, call 911. ■

Do you know someone who is being abused?

If you are being abused, have been abused, or know someone who is being abused, you can call Victims Assistance Ministry at (800) 355-2545 for assistance to make a report, or seek help directly by contacting one of the Child Protective Services or one of the Law Enforcement Agencies listed below. In an emergency call 911.

Los Angeles County

- > LA County Child Abuse Hotline: (800) 540-4000
- > Investigative Control Unit for All Child Abuse Reports: (213) 486-0530
- > Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department:
- > Special Victims Bureau (24 hours) (562) 946-8531
- > To speak to a detective (562) 946-7960
- > District Attorney's Office: Sexual Crimes Division (213) 974-9790
- > Family Violence Division (213) 974-3785
- > For callers residing outside the State of California who wish to contact Child Protective Services in Los Angeles: (213) 639-4500

Santa Barbara County

- > Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Hotline: (800) 367-0166
- > District Attorney Victim-Witness Assistance: (805) 568-2400

Ventura County

- > Ventura County Child Abuse Hotline: (805) 654-3200
- > District Attorney Victim's Services: (805) 654-3622