

Office of Victims Assistance Ministry Helps Abused Victims Find Healing

The Victims Assistance Ministry Office of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles was created in April 2002 to respond to allegations of past or current sexual abuse by anyone working or volunteering for the Archdiocese - clergy, religious or lay persons. The Office is charged with creating a safe and compassionate environment in which victim-survivors can come forward and receive counseling and other assistance in the healing process. The Office is also charged with ensuring that allegations of sexual abuse are reported to the appropriate civil authorities.

Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse

Clergy, school personnel, and many parish staff members have been designated as mandated reporters of child abuse under California law. When one of these persons receives information leading to a "reasonable suspicion" that a child is being abused or neglected, he or she must make a report to the appropriate child protection or law enforcement agency.

See *Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse at:*

<https://lacatholics.org/reporting-child-abuse/>

When to Call Victims Assistance Ministry

If you are being or have been abused, or know someone who is being or has been abused by a priest, deacon, religious, parish or school staff or volunteer, please call Victims Assistance Ministry at (800) 355-2545 to report. You can also seek help directly by contacting one of the Child Protective Services or Law Enforcement Agencies listed below.

You may also call Victims Assistance Ministry in the Archdiocese to report abuse suffered in another diocese and receive assistance in connecting with the appropriate persons in that diocese.

For help making a report and assistance accessing the resources listed call the Office of Victims Assistance Ministry at (800) 355-2545 or visit the website at:

<https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/protecting-children/>

Los Angeles County:

LA County Department of Children & Family Services & Child Protective 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

LA County Department Children & Family Services
Emergency Response Command Post:
(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 Adult & Child Abuse Hotline:
(805) 654-3200

District Attorney Victim's Services: (805) 654-3622

In an emergency, dial 911.

Fingerprinting Department

Clergy/Paid Staff: All Clergy and paid staff **must be** fingerprinted according to Archdiocesan Policy.

Parish/School Volunteers: All adult volunteers who have regular contact with students/minors, including coaches, parents/guardians, people assisting in the classroom, and others **must be fingerprinted** before beginning their assignment. For specific information on Fingerprinting Policies and Guidelines: <http://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-9/section-9-3>

The Fingerprinting Department Newsletter with further details can be found at:
<https://lacatholics.org/fingerprinting/>

Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

April
2020 – 2021



Policies

Programs

Reporting

Resources



My dear brothers and sisters,

In the last two decades, the Catholic Church here in Los Angeles has confronted the scourge of child sexual abuse by putting in place effective systems to support victims and protect children in our parishes, schools and ministries.

In this brochure, and on our website, protect.la-archdiocese.org, you will find important background and resources on our efforts to prevent abuse and to support victim-survivors. You can also learn about our protocols for reporting and investigating suspected abuse by those serving in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and for removing offenders from ministry.

Because of the hard work and dedication of our Safeguard the Children Program staff, and the hundreds of thousands of employees, volunteers, clergy and lay faithful who have participated in the program, new cases of abuse are rare today in the Church in Los Angeles.

We remain vigilant in our commitment to protect children and report allegations and remove perpetrators from ministry. And through our Office of Victims Assistance Ministry, we continue to provide pastoral care and financial support to help victim-survivors find healing, justice, and hope.

Thank you for your commitment to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded in our parishes, schools, ministries and communities. Together we are making a difference.

I entrust all our children and families to the tender care and protection of Our Blessed Mother Mary.

+ José H. Gomez

Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles

"Let us find the courage needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated."

(Pope Francis Letter on Zero Tolerance - December, 2016)

Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* was adopted by the Bishops of the United States in June 2002. This important document contains the Essential Norms which are the Church's response to child sexual abuse and the foundation for a concrete plan to proactively prevent child sexual abuse. Key components of the implementation of the *Charter* in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles include:

Office of Safeguard the Children and Safeguard the Children Parish Committees

The establishment of the Office of Safeguard the Children and formation of Safeguard the Children Parish Committees has been mandated since 2002. The Office of Safeguard the Children assists these permanent Parish Committees in implementing child sexual abuse prevention education, Safe Environment policies, procedures and resources. For information: <https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children/>

Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Education for Adults

VIRTUS® "Protecting God's Children" is a three-hour training for adults which teaches the "Five Steps of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention." They are:

- Know the Warning Signs
- Control Access
- Monitor all Programs and Ministries
- Be Aware
- Communicate Your Concerns

This program is mandated for all adults who work or volunteer with and around children or youth on a regular basis. Over 329,000 clergy, staff, volunteers and parents have attended the program. For information: www.virtusonline.org

Children & Youth Abuse Prevention Programs

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has created the *Empowering God's Children and Young People*® Safety Program to teach children and young people to protect themselves from child sexual abuse by learning about such topics as:

- The Five Body Safety Rules & Safe Adults
- Boundaries & Bullying
- Internet Safety

Recognizing that parents are the "primary educators" of their children, these programs encourage parent involvement in reinforcing what their children have learned by providing: a parent/child take-home exercise for each lesson, VIRTUS® bulletins and other resources. For information: (213) 637-7460 or <https://lacatholics.org/empowering-gods-children/>

Archdiocese of Los Angeles Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Policies

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has implemented rigorous policies and procedures to provide a safe environment in our parishes and parish schools for all children and young people. These include:

- "Zero Tolerance"
- Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Minors at the Parish/School Activities or Events
- Code of Conduct for Middle and High School Students Volunteering with Minors

To view these and other policies: <http://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-9>

"Did You Know" Bulletin Announcements

Sunday parish bulletins contain weekly "Did You Know" excerpts from articles on child and youth safety. For complete articles: <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>