

**ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES**  
**SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE**  
**HANDBOOK**



***CREATING A CIRCLE OF SAFETY  
FOR  
OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE***



**SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE HANDBOOK**  
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**SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE HANDBOOK**  
**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**



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**Archdiocese of Los Angeles**

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Joan Vienna  
Director, Safeguard the Children  
September 2025

Dear Safeguard the Children Parish Committee Chairperson and Members,

The Safeguard the Children Parish Committees have been the cornerstone of our efforts in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles since the inception of the Safeguard the Children Office in 2004. They play a critical role in helping to establish a safe environment for our children and young people, protecting them from child sexual abuse and other safety concerns. As caring adults, we are all called to be the “eyes, ears and voices of our children, young people, and vulnerable adults.”

The updated *Safeguard the Children Committee Handbook* is designed to offer guidance and resources for you and your committee. It will help you understand the vision and establish clear objectives to realize the vision for your specific parish and/or school

The *Handbook* also features the 2024 Quick and Easy Safe Environment Resource Guide, providing easy access of **one click** to the latest safe environment policies, procedures, requirements, and resources with just one click. It also contains contact information for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. (Throughout the *Handbook*, italicized references will direct you to where you can find the information in the Resource Guide).

Thank you for your willingness to contribute. Together, we are making a positive impact on the lives of our children and young people!"

Sincerely,

Joan Vienn, Director

Pastoral Regions: Our Lady of the Angels San Fernando San Gabriel San Pedro Santa Barbara



**Archdiocese of Los Angeles**  
**Office of Safeguard the Children**  
**Quick & Easy Safe Environment Resource**  
*September 2024*

This “Quick & Easy Safe Environment Easy Resource” is designed to give you easy “one-click” access to all the safe environment resources and contact information you need to fulfill your ongoing commitment to protecting our children, young people and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse!

**Mandatory USCCB Safe Environment Audit Report annually sent out by Fr. James M. Anguiano, Moderator of the Curia & Vicar General, the first week in March –**  
<https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children/>



1-2 **Safeguard the Children Parish Committee Handbook** contains complete information and resources. – [Archdiocese of Los Angeles Safeguard the Children Parish Committee Handbook](#)



3. **“Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse”** brochures should be given to the parent/guardian of your students the brochures at the beginning of the school year or during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

Order Form for free brochures in English, Spanish Korean, and Chinese – [Working Together Order Form](#)

4. **“Did You Know?” Bulletin Inserts** requires that your parish have a *Safeguard the Children* section for the “Did You Know” notices in your weekly parish bulletin. - <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>



5. **April Child Abuse Prevention Month** is celebrated annually to increase awareness throughout the parishes and schools. – <https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month/>

6. Display **“Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse”** in a prominent place and a give a copy to all catechists and/or Youth Ministry leaders – **Reporting Child Abuse -** [Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse](#)

7. **Office of Victims Assistance Ministry** was created to deal with past or current sexual abuse allegations by clergy, religious, or any lay person working or volunteering for the Archdiocese. – <https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/protecting-children/>

8. **Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Minors at Parish or Parish School Activities or Events** must be reviewed and signed annually.

For copy of the documents in English, Spanish, Chinese, or Korean – <https://lacatholics.org/policies-and-procedures/>

[Archdiocese of Los Angeles Boundary Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Middle and High School Youth Working or Volunteering with Children/Youth. Administrative Handbook](#) – [Boundary Guidelines and Code of Conduct Minor Volunteers](#)



9. **Initial Safe Environment Training** 3-hour live *VIRTUS® Protecting God's Children 4.0* Adult Awareness Training to be completed before working or volunteering in any ministry. *Administrative Handbook* – [Adult Safe Environment Initial Training Summary](#)

**Finding a VIRTUS® Session** - <https://lacatholics.org/education-and-training/>

**Adult Recertification Safe Environment Training Summary** *Administrative Handbook* – [Adult Safe Environment Training Recertification Summary](#)

**Safe Environment Recertification** is every four years. Recertification Options:

Option #1 – repeating the 3 hr. *Protecting God's Children* Certification

Option #2 – taking the 1 ½ hr. *Keeping the Promise Alive* Recertification

Option #3 – reading & completing the quizzes for *48 VIRTUS® Online Bulletins*

Option #4 – taking the *Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect* Online.

10. Annual “*Empowering God's Children and Young People®*” Safe Environment Training. All Training must be on a regular class date, not an optional or alternative date. For current lesson plans, permission letters, lesson plans, links, and resources – <https://lacatholics.org/empowering-gods-children/>



- All Empowering God's Children and Young People® Safe Environment Training must be completed **on/or before February 1<sup>st</sup>** of each year.
- All Empowering God's Children and Young People® Safe Environment Training must be recorded on VIRTUS® Online **no later than February 15<sup>th</sup>** of each year.

11. **Opt-Out Forms** – email Brenda Cabrera [bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org)

12. **Fingerprinting Policies & Guidelines** all persons, whether paid or volunteer, who have regular contact with minors or vulnerable adults are fingerprinted and agree that the archdiocese or other specified person will receive any subsequent arrest notifications. Fingerprinting Calendars – <https://lacatholics.org/fingerprinting/>



**Safe Environment Platform (SEP) Operator:**

- confirms that all adult staff/volunteers have been fingerprinted
- records all Adult Safe Environment Training Records in SEP.

**How to Host Fingerprinting at your Facility** - [Download the “Hosting Website Update” here \(SEP\) Operator Request Form](#) – [Click here to download the SEP Request Form](#)

13. **Short-Term Faculties (Up to Two Months in the Archdiocese)** Priests coming for extended holidays, for study programs, or by invitation who want a parish experience or priests coming to assist in a parish to help with ministry needs (such as those who are in the archdiocese for summer supply) may receive short-term faculties from the archdiocese. *Administrative Handbook* - <https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-5/section-5-13/topic-5-13-5>

14. **Allegation** of Child Sexual Abuse of children by clergy or lay staff member(s) during the current audit period for information contact Heather Banis [hbanis@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:hbanis@la-archdiocese.org)



## Safe Environment Contact List

### Safeguard the Children

**Joan Vienna**                      [jvienna@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:jvienna@la-archdiocese.org)                      (213) 637-7227  
**Coordinator**

**Brenda Cabrera**                      [bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org)                      (213) 637-7508  
**Associate Director**

### Victims Assistance Ministry

**Heather Banis**                      [hbanis@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:hbanis@la-archdiocese.org)                      (213) 637-7650  
**Coordinator**

### Fingerprinting

**Dn. John Barry**                      [dnjbarry@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:dnjbarry@la-archdiocese.org)                      (213) 637-7680  
**Specialist**  
**Safe Environment Platform (SEP)**

### Life, Justice and Peace

**Isaac Cuevas**                      [icuevas@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:icuevas@la-archdiocese.org)                      (213) 637-7484  
**Director of Immigration**  
**and Public Affairs**

### Legal Department

**Marge Graf**                      [mggraf@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:mggraf@la-archdiocese.org)                      (213) 637-7511  
**Legal Counsel**





## **CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION BLESSING**

*(For Use at Safeguard the Children Committee Meetings.)*

**Dear Lord,**

**We ask You to bless us, “Your Holy People.” who have gathered here for our Safeguard the Children Committee Meeting. Open our hearts to Your call to be the “eyes, ears and voice of children and young people everywhere” as You guide us in learning new ways to help prevent child sexual abuse. Grant us the vision and commitment we need to make our homes, churches, schools, communities and world a safer place for all God’s children. We offer our participation in the Safeguard the Children Committee on behalf of all victims of child sexual abuse and pray for their continued healing.**

**Amen**



## FORMING YOUR SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN PARISH COMMITTEE



“Each parish/school site in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is mandated to have a *Safeguard the Children Committee*. This is not optional.” (September 2004) Your *Safeguard the Children Committee* will differ in its membership and size depending on whether you have elementary, pre-school, or in some cases, a high school attached. If a high school is not affiliated with a parish, it is required that they form their own *Committee*. It is the mission of each *Committee* to reflect the safety needs of the children and youth at the site.

### THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR/ADMINISTRATOR/PARISH LIFE DIRECTOR OR PASTORAL ASSOCIATE

The Pastor/Administrator/Parish Life Director/Pastoral Associate is **directly responsible** for overseeing the Safeguard the Children Parish Committee and being present at all Committee Meetings. He or she must:

#### **1. PERSONALLY SELECT AND INVITE A VOLUNTEER TO BE THE COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON:**

The chairperson should be especially selected by the pastor/administrator, parish life director or pastoral associate. It is important to look for a person who will understand the purpose of the Committee and has an enthusiastic commitment to protecting our children and young people. It can be a police officer, therapist, nurse, a school parent or other caring adult from the parish or school community who is passionate about protecting our children and young people and who will:

- **Bring a new perspective and energy from the parish/school community.**
- **Protect staff members from becoming overburdened.**
- **Keep everyone accountable.**

#### **2. ASSURES THE ATTENDANCE OF STAFF COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

The staff of the parish/school staff members listed below are directly responsible for the wellbeing of the children in their care. They are the ones in authority and responsible for following the Charter for the Protecting of Children and Young People and for implementing the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Safe Environment policies, procedures and guidelines. Their support and enthusiasm is critical to a successful Committee, e.g.: education opportunities, site evaluations and Child Abuse new resource development. Staff members should include any of the following positions that apply:

- **Principal and/or Vice-Principal**
- **Director of Religious Education**
- **Confirmation Coordinator**
- **Youth Minister**
- **Pre-School Coordinator**

### **3. HELPS IDENTIFY AND SELECT VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

The *Committee* is also required to have volunteers that represent the children and youth in the parish and/or school community:

- **Parent representatives from the Catholic School and/or Religious Education Program**
- **Representatives from various cultural groups in the parish**
- **A representative from the Parish Council**

It is also helpful to have community members who have expertise in child abuse prevention, such as adults from the parish community such as a:

- **Therapist**
- **Law Enforcement Officer**
- **Nurse**
- **Social Worker**
- **VIRTUS® Facilitator**

### **REQUIRED COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

**“All Safeguard the Children Committees are required to have a minimum of two formal meetings a year, (July 1, 2009)**

**However, it is highly recommended that the Committee have at least one additional meeting at end the school year to review and celebrate their goals and accomplishments for the year and to set the calendar for the dates for the meeting of the coming school year.**

\*However, it is highly recommended that the *Committee* meet quarterly using the *Safeguard the Children Committee Handbook* as a guide for creating a three-year child sexual abuse prevention and safety plan.

### **REQUIRED COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Detailed minutes are required of at least two *Committee* meetings and must be recorded each year and signed by the Pastor, Administrator, Parish Life Director or Principal. (July 1, 2009)**

Copies of the minutes must be kept on file at the parish/school site and submitted with the annual USCCB Safe Environment Parish or High School Audit Compliance Report.

## SUGGESTED COMMITTEE MEETING TIMES AND TOPICS

### First Meeting: August/September: Overall Planning and Goals

In Compliance!!!

The Safeguard the Children Committee plays an important role in “reviewing” that what needs to be done for the year in order for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles’ policies and procedures to be implemented and helping staff focus on who needs training, fingerprinting and policies for the current school year. Although the administration of SEP (Safe Environment Platform) is not usually the responsibility of the Chairperson, the report for the current school year should be reviewed to ascertain . The Committee helps in the overall that all adults who work or volunteer, with or around children, have attended the VIRTUS® Adult Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs and that all children and young people have received the Empowering God’s Children and Young People Safety Program. The Committee also helps educate parents and caring adults through the use of outside speakers and resources.

- Ensure, all parish/school volunteers, teachers, staff or other paid personnel, who work in any capacity with or around children, as well as vulnerable adults or special needs persons, will be required to participate in the VIRTUS® Protecting God’s Children Awareness Session for Adults. #9 - <https://lacatholics.org/education-and-training/>
- Check number of people to be trained and schedule Protecting God’s Children and Keeping the Promise Alive Recertification session with VIRTUS® Facilitator and church or school office.
- \*\*Help plan, organize and advertise fingerprinting dates and for all parish/school staff and volunteers who are alone with or who have supervisory control over minors. Host fingerprinting session sign up registration and facility of the hours selected. #12 - <https://lacatholics.org/fingerprinting/>
- Assure that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Minors at Parish/school Activities or Events are reviewed and signed annually. The link below to the Guidelines should be given annually to the parish staff, volunteers and ministry leaders as well as the school staff and volunteers copy of the signed “Acknowledgement of Receipt” must be filed at the parish/school. #8 - <https://lacatholics.org/policies-and-procedures/>
- All children and young people in any Archdiocesan Catholic School, Religious Education, Confirmation Programs or Youth Ministry Groups must receive annual Safe Environment Training through the VIRTUS® Empowering God’s Children and Young People Safety Program. All trainings must be recorded on VIRTUS® Online. #10 - <https://lacatholics.org/empowering-gods-children/>
- Ordering and checking placement of Working Together Brochures, Safe Environment Posters and “Did You Know?” Bulletin Announcements. #4 - <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>

### **Second Meeting: January/February Planning - Child Abuse Prevention Month**

*Celebrating what we as members of the Catholic Church are doing to help stop child sexual abuse is an important role of the Committee. April is a great month to spread the word that “together we are making a difference” not only in our parishes/schools but also to the surrounding community.*

- \*Plan to celebrate Child Abuse Prevention Month in April at your parish. (Keeping Kids Safe Resource and Idea Packet distributed to all parishes and Catholic Schools from the Office of Safeguard the Children at the beginning of March.)

#5 - <https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month/>

- Feature a **“Did You Know?”** section in your weekly bulletin and/or parish website. List your Safeguard the Children Committee Chair and include the Committee’s mission, goals and activities. Include easy-to-use, approved bulletin announcements that can be found at:

#4 - <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>

- Order and display the current year’s **“Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse”** brochures in the vestibule of the parish and parish office, school and Religious Education Office. Also, distribute the brochures during Child Abuse Prevention month to all parents of school and religious education children.

#3 - [2024- 2025 Working Together Form](#)

- Celebrating “Keep Kids Safe” year round.** Many parishes and schools are contacting the Office of Safeguard the Children for resources for booths and displays that they now have as a part of parish and school events such as:

- Ministry Fairs
- Carnivals and Fiestas
- Back-to-School Nights

Some of the items that are offered free include:

“Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse” brochures, parent handouts and VIRTUS® Articles, Keep Kids Safe Stickers, Coloring Pages, that can be used at these and other events.

#5 - <https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month/>

The Committee must be familiar with the *Archdiocesan Administrative Handbook*, which contains all the Safe Environment policies, procedures, training, form, etc.

**Chapter 9: Safe Environment** / <http://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-9>

**Third Meeting: May/June - Wrap-up Meeting**



*As we conclude, it is highly recommended for the Parish and School Committee to hold a final meeting at the end of the school year. This final gathering ensures a smooth transition into next year's planning and fosters a sense of achievement and continuity within the committee. This provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the:*

- Accomplishments of the year,
- Review progress toward goals,
- And set the calendar for the upcoming year's meetings.



- Distribute *Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse* Brochures to all Catholic Schools and Religious Education Parents. #3 - [Working Together Order Form](#)
- Order the “Promise to Protect – Pledge to Heal Posters” and display around the parish vestibule and in the school. #5 - [Promise to Protect – Pledge to Heal Posters](#)
- During the month of April, distribute the “**Keeping Kids Safe**” Stickers to all the Catholic Schools/Religious Education Children. Decorate bulletin boards and other display areas with the “Keeping Kids Safe” posters or plant a pinwheel garden with pencil pinwheels made by the children/youth.
- Have a “**Keep Kids Safe**” table after every Mass one weekend in April.
- Have a “**Keep Kids Safe**” booth at your annual Fiesta or Carnival. Child Abuse Prevention resources are available from the Office of Safeguard the Children throughout the year! Here are some things you can do:
  - Have a **Safeguard the Children Team** that specifically monitors the safety of minors. #5 - <https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month/>
  - Decorate a booth with pinwheels, posters stickers, brochures, etc. #5 - [“Keeping Kids Safe” Poster/Pinwheel/Sticker Order Form](#)
  - Distribute “Keeping Kids Safe” Stickers. #5 - [“Keeping Kids Safe” Poster/Sticker Order Form](#)
  - Distribute *Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse* brochures. #3 - [Working Together Order Form](#)
  - VIRTUS® Bulletins for Parents and Guardians, etc. <http://www.la-archdiocese.org/org/protecting/Pages/VIRTUS-Current-Online-Articles.aspx>
- *St. Margaret Mary* had a “Keeping Kids Safe” Free Community Information Fair.
- *St. John the Evangelist* held a living rosary with children from the school and the Religious Education program praying for the prevention of child abuse as well as for survivors of abuse.
- *Dolores Mission* created a Safeguard the Children Awareness Wall.
- *Sacred Heart* made pinwheels with the five steps in English and Spanish, Botton, and a poster board to provide information on Child Abuse Prevention Month. We enjoyed helping the community.



## OPTIONAL PASTOR/ADMINISTRATOR/PARISH LIFE DIRECTORS

### **PREVIEW: PARISH / SCHOOL POLICIES, PROGRAMS & EVENTS**

*Each parish/school site has many programs and events that take place each year. Many of these are open to the community at large. It is important to review these on a yearly basis and evaluate any safety issues that may arise and establish clear safe environment monitoring policies and procedures for addressing them.*

- \*Know and monitor all programs at your parish/school site and review them on a regular basis** (i.e.: Do you know the leaders of all the programs in your parish that operate when children are present?). Develop a “Parish Program/Ministry Review Sheet.”
- Review procedures for monitoring visitors who come to the site and establish sign-in procedures.
- Review outside organizations that use the parish (i.e.: AA, Rotary Club, Boy Scouts, etc.). Do you monitor outside groups that rent your parish to give lessons to children or young people? See Outside Vender Agreement.  
[http://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/Handbook%20Resources/outside\\_user\\_agreement.pdf](http://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/Handbook%20Resources/outside_user_agreement.pdf)
- Have a review committee for any new ministries or activities beginning in the parish.
- Evaluate and monitor any parish/school events such as fiestas, carnivals, Christmas gatherings, etc., to ensure that they provide a safe environment for children and young people who attend.
- \*Review parking lot procedures and traffic patterns to ensure safe drop-off and pick-up of children and youth.** Be sure to monitor the “Youth Mass” and activities as well; even though we consider them young adults, they are still minors.

### **COMMITTEE REVIEW NOTES:**





## PARISH/SCHOOL SITE SAFETY

*(Optional at Priest/Pastor/Administrator/PLD Discretion)*

*Although Safeguard the Children focuses on child abuse prevention, it is also about the safety of our children at all times! The following list is provided to assist the Committee in an annual review and evaluation of the parish/school site from the safe environment perspective.*

- Create and maintain an annual record of key holders and access points; recall keys and change locks if needed.
- Secure secluded rooms or areas in buildings or on the grounds to ensure safety.
- Conduct safety checks of all rooms used for children's classes/activities, ensuring they are free of dangerous equipment, broken furniture, unsafe stair access, and inappropriate storage or trash.
- Install clear signs for designated "Children Only" areas (bathrooms, play areas, etc.) and enforce usage rules. Include safety signs where necessary (e.g., "No children in teacher/staff areas").
- Check property fencing and security to ensure children are safely contained and strangers are kept out.
- Review and improve check-in/check-out procedures for all programs involving children, including school, religious education, confirmation, youth ministry, and after-school activities.
- Consider using "Visitor" badges to identify adults with permission to be on the premises.
- Assess the need for safety cameras and prepare cost estimates for presentation to the Finance Committee.
- Ensure the security of parish/school computers by maintaining proper passwords, firewalls, and other safeguards.
- Review parish/school websites to confirm parental permission has been obtained for non-public event photos.





## Annual USCCB Safe Environment Pre-Audit & Audit Process

*(Optional at Priest/Pastor/Administrator/PLD Discretion)*

*The Safeguard the Children Chairperson and his/her Committee plays an important part in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Safe Environment Audit Process.*

- The Chairperson and Committee may be asked to assist the pastor in completing the annual “USCCB Safe Environment Audit Report” and returning it to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles by the deadline. [2024 USCCB Safe Environment Parish Audit Report](#)
- \*The Chairperson is to provide a minimum of two sets of Safeguard the Children Parish Committee Meeting Minutes to be included with the completed Report. #1-2 - <https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-9/section-9-2>
- The Chairperson and Committee are also asked to participate in any “onsite” “Safe Environment Pre-Audit” and USCCB audits. (If the Chairperson is a volunteer and cannot participate because of work, this requirement is waived. All parish/school staff who are members of the *Committee* must attend.)
- The Chairperson and Committee review the location of all parish/school safe environment compliance records to help ensure that they are clearly filed and easily accessible. (i.e.: VIRTUS® “Protecting God’s Children” Certificates, Signature Sheets of “Guidelines for Adults Working and Volunteering with Minors”, Fingerprinting Records verified on VPIN, Children’s Training recorded on VIRTUS® Online, Parent Opt-Out Forms, etc.).

We as the people of God, are called to form a community of caring adults working together to prevent child sexual abuse. We pledge to be the **“eyes, ears and voice of children and young people”** everywhere.

We are committed to the vision of creating a safe environment for the children and young people in our parishes, schools, homes and communities as we pledge to continue learning new ways of preventing child sexual abuse.

**“Together We Are Making a Difference!”**





