

Safeguard the Children Parish Committees

The Office of Safeguard the Children and the formation of Safeguard the Children Parish Committees were mandated by Cardinal Roger Mahony in 2002. The parish committees are foundational in ensuring the safe environment of parishes and schools throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. These permanent committees coordinate initiatives such as education opportunities, site evaluations and local presentations by speakers including police, nurses and therapists. The committees are also responsible for implementing archdiocesan safe environment policies and procedures.

An emphasis is being put on awareness and training programs implemented by the Office of Safeguard the Children. “The only way we will make a difference is through education,” said Joan Vienna, director of the Offices of Safeguard the Children and Family Life.

VIRTUS® adult awareness sessions include training about warning signs that indicate an adult is engaged in an inappropriate or abusive relationship with a child.

Another focus has been VIRTUS® Teaching Touching Safety for children in grades K-12 and the Good Touch/Bad Touch® body safety programs for children K-6.

Establishing Healthy Boundaries is geared towards helping teachers and catechists engage 7th, 8th and 9th graders in discussions focusing on sexual abuse, sexual harassment and bullying.

“Through these programs, children are being trained to come forward if they don’t feel safe, and adults are being trained to listen,” said Vienna.

Those working or volunteering with youth also are required to sign a code of conduct: “Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Minors at Parish and Parish School Events.” Another code of conduct, “Boundary Guidelines for Junior High and High School Youth Working or Volunteering with Children and Youth,” has been developed for junior high and high school youth working or volunteering with children or youth in schools or parishes.

Safeguard the Children also works collaboratively with the Offices of Catholic Schools, Religious Education, Family Life and Human Resources.

As parishes and schools gain experience, policies and programs will continue to be developed and revised.

“Our dream is to protect all children, because every child deserves to have a safe and happy childhood,” said Vienna. “God is calling us to do this.”

(This ministry complies with Articles 4, 6, 12 and 16 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.)

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