

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN: NOT JUST FOR THIS MONTH

Dear Pastor and Parishioners,

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. This seems an appropriate time to stress that *every month* should be child abuse prevention month in the parishes, schools, offices, agencies, and institutions of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

It must be acknowledged that in years past the Church's actions to prevent crimes against children under our care and the reactions to abuse when it happened were often inadequate or worse, whatever the reasons. I very much regret that, and I apologize to anyone who was hurt as a child by a cleric, employee or volunteer representing the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

Now, however, we have in place child-protection policies in our *Decree on Child Protection*, and the Archdiocese is committed to enforcing them. Since 1993, more than 85,000 clergy, employees and volunteers have been trained in the provisions of the *Decree*. Since 2003, more than 68,000 adults have had criminal background checks performed, including 52,400 currently working with children.

At the same time, we want to help bring healing and justice to any victims of abuse who have not yet surfaced. I urge anyone who was abused as a child by a representative of the Archdiocese, or knows someone who was, to report the abuse immediately to the secular legal authorities and to the Victim Assistance Coordinator of the Archdiocese, Sister Mary Garke, at (513) 421-3131 or 1 (800) 686-2724. The Archdiocese, too, reports all accusations of child abuse to secular legal authorities.

In recent weeks, we have been inundated by media reports concerning Pope Benedict XVI's actions in cases of child abuse while he was archbishop of Munich and later as Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). I have no special direct knowledge about these matters, but the following might be helpful.

The Church welcomes honest reporting, even when it is critical of the Church and painful. However, much of the reporting in this instance has been neither fair nor accurate. (To cite just one example, Pope Benedict has been criticized for actions of the CDF in the 1980s and 1990s – many years before child abuse cases were put under the CDF's jurisdiction in 2001.) For this reason, I urge you not to form judgments based on secular press accounts alone. For a more balanced presentation, also read *The Catholic Telegraph*. In addition, excellent online resources are the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' blog at <http://usccbmedia.blogspot.com> and a special section of the Vatican website at http://www.vatican.va/resources/index_en.htm.

Also, in reading news stories about how the Church handled abuse allegations against priests some decades ago, it's important not to read into them the knowledge that we have now. As recently as 1984, a supposedly authoritative psychological textbook said, "Early sexual contacts do not appear to have harmful effects on many children unless the family, legal authorities, or society reacts negatively" (McCary and McCary, *Human Sexuality*, 3rd ed., 1984, p. 226). I was not a bishop at that time, but this kind of advice informed the inadequate decisions many bishops made in those years.

We now know better. The sexual abuse of children is often devastating. Please pray for victim/survivors as we work to prevent child abuse this month and every month.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati