



The Ministry of Child Protection

The Church in the United States observes April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, and it is a fitting time to give you an annual update on our efforts to keep children safe in the Diocese of Baker. Elsewhere in this issue Barry Metzentine, diocesan Coordinator of Child Protection, describes how our program works and reviews its progress in 2014.

Last year, for my part, I met regularly with the other nine members of the Diocesan Review Board to receive Barry's reports on developments in our program's implementation and to review incidents of reported child abuse on the part of anyone who works for or volunteers for the Diocese or any of our parishes.

This year I will view these matters from a wider perspective as a new member of the Bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People. Composed of 16 bishops and 10 consultants from all around the country, the Committee holds four meetings a year, two of them jointly with the National Review Board of lay Catholic experts (which gives its own report each year to all the bishops assembled in Baltimore.) We are charged with ensuring national implementation of and faithful adherence to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* which the American bishops adopted in 2002.

In creating the new Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, Pope Francis looked to the efforts of the Church in the United States as a model for effective child protection programs in the Church throughout the world. Members of the Commission come from Africa, Asia, South America, and Oceania. To their important task they bring varied and well-tested competencies. One of them, Sister Kayula Lesa from Zambia, has extensive experience working with refugees and victims of human trafficking. Another, Peter Saunders of London, established the (English) National Association for People Abused in Childhood. All of them share the Holy Father's conviction "that everything possible must be done to rid the Church of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused."

It is said that the best offense is a good defense. Our best defense against sexual abuse is an ever-widening awareness of how it happens. For sexual predators take great pains to keep their dark purposes hidden from view. Masters of deception, they disguise their intentions in order to circumvent the precautions of parents and parish and gain access to the vulnerable. So the prospect of public exposure is a powerful deterrent to those who would prey upon the innocence of the unsuspecting young. Widespread parish (and community) vigilance creates an environment unfriendly to abusers, and precisely such vigilance is what our Child Protection Program is designed to promote.