

Re: Important Information Concerning "Safe" Environment Training

From: Office of Child and Youth Protection

3211 Fourth Street NE
Washington, DC 20017-1194

September 9, 2005

To: All Bishops

From: Teresa M. Kettelkamp
Executive Director

Subject: Office of Child and Youth Protection and Audit Update

As many of you already know, the audits ascertaining compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* are underway. As of the end of August, approximately 24 audits will have been completed: 3 full audits, 5 focused audits and 16 self audits.

There are two audit-related issues that have come to the attention of the Office of Child and Youth Protection which I thought would interest all the Bishops; and thus, I would like to share with you. The first issue involves the safe environment training of children and the opting-out of this training. The second issue concerns Required Actions.

Under the *Charter*, arch/dioceses/eparchies must do all of the following:

Establish age-appropriate safe environment training for children.

- Once established, this training must be offered to the children.
- The arch/diocese/eparchy must provide the training.
- There must be documentation for accountability purposes to ensure training has taken place.

Some arch/dioceses/eparchies have been using a form of safe environment training for children that is not acceptable. In accord with the guidance of the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People and after consulting Bishop Skylstad, I offer the following clarification. An arch/diocese/eparchy's safe environment program cannot consist of only of providing a pamphlet or brochure to a child and/or parent, and asks that it be reviewed with the child. This is not considered "training" as required for compliance with Article 12 of the *Charter*, even if a parent certification is made. Arch/diocesan/eparchial training must be offered. This will ensure that every child receives the same quality and content of instruction by a trained adult as a regular part of a school curriculum or classroom work.

Therefore, any such training programs for children which are totally left to the parents and are not conducted as a regular part of a school or religious education program, curriculum or classroom work and overseen by the arch/diocese/eparchy will not satisfy the requirements of Article 12 of the *Charter*. This will result in the issuing of a Required Action to the arch/diocese/eparchy to provide safe environment training to children as required under Article 12. Not to do so will be considered noncompliance.

All children must receive arch/diocesan/eparchial safe environment training. The only exception to this requirement is for the public school religion students who receive safe environment training as part of their regular public school curriculum. If, after reviewing the public school curriculum an

arch/diocese/eparchy finds that it meets the standards of the arch/diocese/eparchy, the arch/diocese/eparchy may choose not to provide additional safe environment training to the public school religion students. If, however, arch/diocesan/eparchial personnel believe that the public school curriculum is not sufficient, or in need of some supplementation, the arch/diocese/eparchy diocese should to so.

A parent can refuse to allow their child to participate in the arch/diocesan/eparchial, but this must be done on a case-by-case basis, and four conditions must be met. These conditions are:

Arch/diocesan/eparchial training must be offered to the child.

- Arch/diocesan/eparchial safe environment materials must be provided to the parents for the safe environment training of their child.
- The parent must specifically state in writing: (1) that safe environment training was offered to their child, (2) that they refused to allow their children to participate in this training, and (3) that they have received safe environment training materials for their child.
- This document must be maintained by the arch/diocese/eparchy to ensure full accountability concerning the safe environment training of every child.

The only group for which training is optional is the parents. Though parents are encouraged to attend safe environment training and a program must be established for them, they are not required to attend. The only audited item along the lines of safe environment training for parents would be whether or not a safe environment program has been established for parents; not whether they attend.

Some have argued that since the parents are the primary educators of their children, they should decide whether and how their children should receive such sensitive information. Both I and the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People agree that parents are to be the primary educators of their children and have the right to refuse the safe environment training by the Church. However, in such cases the Church needs to help parents who may be inclined to opt-out of the training offered by the Church to appreciate the wider communal and social dimensions of this issue. While they may be attentive to the needs of their own children, they need to look at the greater good of all children cared for and educated by the Church. It is a sad fact today that some parents are unable or unwilling to provide the educational support essential for the safety of their children. Moreover, there is the tragic reality that child and sexual abuse oftentimes takes place in the home. The full cooperation of all the parents in the training offered by the Church sends a strong message that all adults are responsible for the safety of our children and that we as adults are committed to seeing that every child receives age-appropriate information for their protection.

I also take this occasion to dispel an unfortunate misunderstanding and characterization of safe environment training. Since its mandate was the result of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, some have incorrectly concluded that this training is sex education training; it is not. The mandate for safe environment training which includes age appropriate materials pertaining to personal safety including information about improper touching, relationships, and how to deal with uncomfortable situations. It clearly emphasizes reporting such incidents to parents, teachers, and others in authority. Oftentimes, once the parent views the arch/diocese's/eparchy's safe environment training and/or it is explained that the training is not sex education, their concerns are eliminated. Additional information on safe environment training can be found on the USCCB.org Web site under OCYP.

The second audit-related issue concerns the issuance of Required Actions. In past years, the Office of Child and Youth Protection identified in the annual Report those arch/dioceses/eparchies who were

issued Required Actions even if the arch/diocese/eparchy remediated the Required Action by the due date and/or end of the audit year. I plan to do that a little differently this year. Required Actions, if necessary, will be issued after an audit as they have been in the past. But, if the Required Action is remediated by the set deadline or before the end of the calendar year, the arch/diocese/eparchy will only be identified in the OCYP Annual Report as complaint (sic). No mention of the prior Required Action will be made in the Annual Report. By the same token, if the arch/diocese/eparchy does not remediate the Required Action, it will be cited in the report as noncompliant and reference will be made to the Required Action that was issued.

If there are any questions regarding these two issues, please do not hesitate to contact me. My direct number at the USCCB is: (202) 541-5418 and my cell phone number is: (217) 725-3535. One of my key responsibilities is to ensure *Charter* compliance, and I will work with any arch/diocese/eparchy at any time to assist them in this regard.

Finally, since I am not the only new person with the Office of Child and Youth Protection I thought it would be helpful to provide you with a listing of the current staff, and their direct phone numbers.

Current staff members include:

Teresa Kettelkamp, Executive Director

202-541-5418 (direct line)

Sheila Kelly, Deputy Director

202-541-3411

Danna Palmer, Executive Assistant

202-541-5413 (main line for the office)

Gladys Smith, Staff Assistant

202-541-3094 (direct line)

Fax number for the office: 202-541-5410

Thank you, in advance, for your support, guidance and prayers. I look forward to meeting more of you during upcoming meetings, and at the Bishops General Meeting in November.

May God continue to guide us with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as we work protecting His children, and doing His will in all that we do.