

# Internet provides resources on child safety, abuse prevention

—Twenty-first in a series.—

Experts in child safety agree that education — of adults and children — is a key component in creating secure environments in the home, school and elsewhere. The Internet, which of late has been the subject of controversy on this very topic, can also be a source of important information about child safety and the abuse prevention efforts undertaken by the Catholic Church. Many of these websites are updated frequently, and bear revisiting on a regular basis.

The following list of sites is not comprehensive, but offers a snapshot of what types of information are available online. Many sites have links to other sites with related information. Content on some of these websites may not be suitable for young children, so parents and guardians may wish to consult the websites first in order to decide what information is appropriate for sharing with their children.

## **VIRTUS: [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org)**

VIRTUS® programs exist in most of the parishes of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to assist the Church in creating a safe haven for children. Created by a private firm comprised mostly of Catholic professionals, VIRTUS programs seek to protect children “by educating and uniting adults about the reality of sexual abuse; the warning signs of abuse; controlling access to children; monitoring all programs; and speaking their concerns, the risk of child abuse is greatly reduced. Awareness of the problem enables people within a community to discuss the reality of child sexual abuse openly. Breaking the silence about child sexual abuse is a critical first step to begin the process of education, prevention, and healing.”

A feature of VIRTUS’ Protecting God’s Children™ programs is an online continuing education component. While the majority of the VIRTUS website is geared toward continuing education for those persons who have already been through a training program (a password is needed to log on to most content), there is a great deal of information to be had that does not require signing in to access. Most of the information on the site is for adults.

## **U.S. Bishops’ Office of Child and Youth Protection: [www.usccb.org/ocyp/index.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/index.shtml)**

At their June 2002 meeting in Dallas, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops drafted a landmark document in response to the crisis of sexual abuse of children in the Church. This document, setting forth their agreed-upon responsibilities in combating the problem, was entitled the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”

The charter specifically created the Office of Child and Youth Protection and assigned to it three central tasks: to assist each diocese and eparchy (eastern Rite Churches) in implementing “Safe Environment” programs designed to ensure necessary safety and security for all children as they participate in church and religious activities; to develop an appropriate compliance audit mechanism to assist Bishops in adhering to the responsibilities set forth in the Charter; and, to prepare a public, annual report describing the compliance of each diocese and eparchy to the Charter’s provisions.

The OCYP website provides access to complete texts of documents related to sexual abuse in the church and what the church has done and is doing across the nation to ensure the current and future safety of all of our children and young people. *Newly posted:* the 2005 Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, as well as an informative analysis of data on abuse reports by dioceses collected by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

## **Archdiocese of Los Angeles:**

**<http://www.archdiocese.la/protecting/index.php>**

This website provides information on the Archdiocese’s Assistance Ministry Office, which deals confidentially and compassionately with those who wish to report a claim of abuse. Also, one may access archdiocesan policies and procedures for reporting abuse and dealing with abuse claims made against priests and other church representatives.

The website also includes a link to the Archdiocese’s 2004 Report to the People of God, which traces the evolution of the archdiocese’s response to claims of sexual abuse by priests from 1930 to the present. A listing of bulletin announcements regarding child safety issues is also available for downloading.

**The Tidings Newspaper ([www.the-tidings.com](http://www.the-tidings.com))** includes more in-depth news articles that provide background and context regarding the issue of sexual abuse and the church. The Tidings also provides an online compendium of weekly articles on abuse prevention, child safety and related issues for interested readers.

## **L.A. County District Attorney “Protecting Our Kids”:**

**<http://www.lada.tv/pok/>**

The Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office devotes a considerable amount of its website to providing resources on Internet safety for parents and children. The site acknowledges that “most children know more about the Internet than their parents do,” and offers some frightening statistics to that illustrate the potential danger of this knowledge gap, including: “Seventy-one percent of all parents stop monitoring their child’s use of the Internet after the child turns 14, not knowing that 72 percent of all Internet-related missing children are 15 years of age or older.”

Recent news reports confirm that Internet predators take advantage of the lack of responsible adult supervision of their children’s Internet usage. The District Attorney’s website offers parents a primer on Internet terms and functions, explaining such things as the ABC’s of online gaming, blogs and newsgroups. Very practical information on how to talk to your children about computer potentials and dangers, how to control and monitor their use of the computer, and how to balance their privacy with parents’ need to know are all to be found on this comprehensive website.

More information on helpful websites will be forthcoming in a future article.

*This weekly series of feature stories, commentary and analysis is compiled and edited by an advisory group to the Media Relations Office of the Archdiocese, through which the articles are distributed.*