

Combating “*Charter Fatigue*”- New Strategies for the Next Decade

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Make no mistake! The Catholic Church throughout the United States has been fighting a very real battle these past eight years. The war against child sexual abuse is not easy. It is a worldwide and deep rooted problem. Winning our battles takes a solid plan like the one carefully mapped out by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops’ *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This document provides us with the vision and strategies that will stop child sexual abuse.

Our victories are constantly mounting but there are also costs. Just when we start winning in the trenches, we are suddenly outflanked by forces such as the press, media, and at times even some of the people within our own camp. Thus, it is inevitable that those of us who are on the front line will experience occasional “*Charter fatigue*.”

During 2009, in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, “live” Recertification and Audit Update Trainings were attended by some 2,000 priests and deacons; 350 VIRTUS® Facilitators were also recertified and 125 new facilitators were trained. We also met with all of our principals, D.R.E.s, youth ministers and Safeguard the Children chairs to gather reinforcements. Finally, we successfully completed the USCCB Safe Environment Onsite Audit. It was a great, but I was totally exhausted. I had “Charter fatigue!”

Because of my experience, this year has become a time to reflect, refocus, review battle plans, recruit new troops and deploy resources more effectively. Following are my 2010 strategies:

Celebrate the Victories: Child Abuse Prevention Month is an important way to celebrate our victories. The USCCB packet is a wonderful and easy way to provide parishes and schools with ideas for sharing their stories of success, as well as resources for bringing everyone together in

prayer for our cause. This year blue ribbons, the symbol for Child Abuse Prevention Month, will mark our efforts in a special way.

Recruit New Troops: It is time to re-energize our efforts in sharing our knowledge and resources with other faith denominations and community organizations and devising new ways of working together. For example, we have begun collaborating with the Los Angeles Police Department, Chamber of Commerce and churches in Ireland and Australia.

Study the Strategies of our Opponents: Perpetrators are always changing their strategies, such as using methods of electronic communication, to lure their victims. A 2010 “Internet and Technology Safety” effort begins with the launch of a new online Archdiocesan *Electronic Communications Handbook* that provides parishes and schools safety and public users strategies for protecting children and young people while spreading the “Good News” through technology. Furthermore, we have partnered with the Los Angeles City District Attorney’s Office to offer free presentations to adults and youth on “Internet Safety” and all of our VIRTUS® adult and children’s programs have this added component.

Rally Our Commanders: Because the U. S. Bishops first rallied us in 2002, we must now confirm their leadership, share our victories with them and be their encouragement as they continue to lead the Church in the vision of the *Charter*. We have come a long way but the battle is not over if any child or young person is still in harm’s way.

As we enter the new decade of our battle, “Charter fatigue” won’t go away but we must never succumb to it because the cause we are fighting for is the safety and well-being of those who are the hope and future of our Church and world.