

REPORTING SUSPECTED SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles has established the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People. This office includes the services of a professional therapist as Victim Assistance Coordinator and a qualified person as Professional Case Administrator.

The Victim Assistance Coordinator is Laura Kahwaji, PsyD, and can be reached at (323) 428-6815. This is a private line answered only by the Victim Assistance Coordinator. The Victim Assistance Coordinator email address is laurak24@gmail.com.

The Victim Assistance Coordinator is available to help victim/survivors make a formal complaint to the Eparchy and offers pastoral support and assistance with psychotherapy, spiritual direction, and referrals to other services that meet the needs of the individual or family seeking assistance.

What Happens When Someone Reports an Allegation of Abuse to the Eparchy?

The Victim Assistance Coordinator will ask if this has been reported to Child Protective Services or the Police Department. If not, the Victim Assistance Coordinator will inform the person that the Policy of the Eparchy is to report the matter to the proper civil authorities.

The preliminary facts gathered by the Victim Assistance Coordinator will be referred to the Professional Case Administrator who prepares a detailed report for consideration by the Eparchial Independent Review Board. When the preliminary investigation (e.g. the initial information gathered by the Victim Assistance Coordinator and/or the supplemental information obtained by the Professional Case Administrator) so indicates, the alleged perpetrator shall be relieved of active ministry/employment (place on administrative leave) pending the conclusion of the investigation. The Independent Review Board then makes its recommendation to the Eparchial Bishop as to whether there is sufficient evidence to sustain that the sexual abuse of a minor has occurred.

The Eparchial Bishop and/or the Victim Assistance Coordinator will share the finding of the Independent Review Board and the Eparchial Bishop's determination concerning the investigation with the alleged victim and perpetrator. In the event there is a determination that abuse occurred and the alleged perpetrator is a clergy, he will be informed of his canonical right to request a canonical trial. If a clergy admits that the abuse occurred, or chooses not to contest the matter, or the finding is sustained at trial then, pursuant to the National Conference of Bishops Charter (Promise to protect, pledge to Heal: Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People), the individual will be permanently removed from ministry.