



## Protecting Children: The Job Goes On

By Tara Little

The Catholic Church in the United States has made great strides in protecting children from clergy sexual abuse, according to Teresa Kettelkamp. But she adds that the job is not done, and “I don’t think the job will ever be done.”

Creating a safe environment for children has been the goal of the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops since the sex abuse crisis came to light in 2002. The same year they developed the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The *Charter* is a comprehensive set of policies and procedures that outline how the Church is to provide outreach to victims, report abuse to civil authorities and the public, as well as train clergy and personnel to create that safe environment.

The fourth action is demonstrating accountability. That’s where Kettelkamp said her office comes in.

Kettelkamp is executive director of the USCCB’s Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection. Her office oversees the annual audit of dioceses, eparchies and religious institutes to determine their compliance with the *Charter*. The audits are conducted with the help of an independent firm.

Kettelkamp, a young 56, brought 29 years experience with the Illinois State Police to her position, which she has held since 2005. Her office publishes an annual report showing how the Church nationwide complies with the charter. The current report is available online at [www.usccb.org/ocyp/index](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/index).



**Teresa Kettelkamp**,  
executive director USCCB  
Secretariat of Child and Youth  
Protection



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
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The *Charter* is operational in all 195 dioceses in the United States, a major feat she calls just “short of miraculous” since it was just implemented in June 2002. Yet most Catholics don’t realize how much the Church has done.

“It’s disheartening because the Church is not going to regain the trust that it’s lost through this clergy sexual abuse crisis, if people don’t know all the good work that’s been accomplished,” Kettelkamp says.

According to the 2007 report, more than 1.8 million clergy, church staff and volunteers have received child sexual abuse prevention training. Another 5.7 million children have been taught to recognize inappropriate behavior from adults and speak up when that occurs. Criminal and personal background checks have also been conducted on 99 percent of the clergy, seminarians and Church staff. And 97 percent of volunteers who work with children have also been checked.

But has abuse stopped? It has decreased, says Kettelkamp.

According to an annual independent survey commissioned by the USCCB, four credible allegations of sexual abuse of children by clergy were reported in 2007. That number was 22 in 2004.

“Even one is horrible,” Kettelkamp says, however.

She pointed out that child sexual abuse goes beyond the Church because it is a “societal epidemic.” Statistics show one in five girls in America are sexually abused by the age of 18 compared to one in six boys.

The best way to keep children safe is to deny those who would harm them access, she said. That’s why background checks are vital.

The background check process varies from diocese to diocese and may include a fingerprint system, criminal history check, interviews and references, Kettelkamp says. For international priests, this also includes a letter from their bishops attesting to their suitability for ministry.

International clergy were involved in half of the allegations of sexual abuse of children in 2007, she said.



“We have to be sure the words we’re using to convey expectations (to international clergy) are clear,” she says.

When providing outreach to victims, the Church’s goal is to treat each victim with compassion and respect. Diocesan programs include support groups, referrals for social services, pastoral care and counseling, which is overseen by victim assistance coordinators, Kettelkamp says.

“We’re moving forward,” but, “I don’t foresee this effort ever ending,” Kettelkamp says. Her goal is to integrate the *Charter* “into the fabric of who we are as Church.”

“We can’t get lax, because that’s when a child will be harmed,” she says. “So even though we’ve come a tremendous way, we can’t say that this thing is behind us.”

