

Child Abuse Awareness Month

DATE: March 31, 2009

FROM: Sr. Mary Ann Walsh

O: 202-541-3200

H: 301-587-4762

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Safe environment programs aid church workers, youth
Catholic Church educates tens of millions through parishes
USCCB offers practical resources on child protection**

CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH TIME FOR PARISHES, DIOCESES TO HIGHLIGHT EFFORTS IN SAFE ENVIRONMENT

WASHINGTON—Parishes and dioceses can use National Child Abuse Awareness Month to educate Catholics on how abuse harms children and what the church is doing to address it, said National Review Board Chair Judge Michael Merz.

Merz heads the lay board of advisers to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on child sexual abuse. He is a federal judge in Dayton, Ohio, and made his comments March 31, just before the April awareness effort was to begin.

“Childhood sexual abuse is a widespread and serious problem in our society,” he said. “With the ability to reach tens of millions of people through its parishes and programs, and informed by its own sexual abuse crisis, the Catholic Church is uniquely positioned to help society address the issue.”

Judge Merz noted that the Church provides resources on the Web at http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/april_cap_month_2009.shtml. He said dioceses across the country have Safe Environment programs organized and staffed by professionals who can help empower children by teaching them how to be safe and alert adults to recognize abusive or potentially abusive behavior.

“The Church should tap these resources to help our entire U.S. society,” he said.

“Child abuse can be subtle at its start,” he said. “For example, boundary violations can escalate into far more serious abuse.”

“We need to use parish bulletins, homilies, diocesan newspapers and Church Web sites to get the message out,” Judge Michael Merz said. “April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and an excellent time for Catholics to address child abuse in American society.”

Keywords: Child abuse, sexual abuse, child protection, Michael Merz, U.S. bishops, Child Abuse Protection Month, child protection, Catholic Church, Catholic bishops

Editors: Interviews can be arranged with Judge Michael Merz, Chairman of the USCCB National Review Board, Bishop Blase Cupich, Chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee for the Protection of Children, or Teresa Kettelkamp, executive director of the USCCB Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection can be arranged by calling the USCCB Office of Media Relations, 202-541-3200.

#####

09-070

DD,SEC,BLOGS,CathReporters,CNS,RNS,Crux