

DIOCESE OF ORANGE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DIOCESE OF ORANGE HONORED FOR PROGRAMS TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ORANGE, Calif., (July 27, 2005) – The Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange will receive the Family Violence Project’s Award for Inspired Action, August 12th. The Family Violence Project is a non profit organization funded largely by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime that trains key community members to recognize and respond to all types of family violence and abuse. The Diocese of Orange Office of Faith Formation oversees the diocesan schools and will receive the award for its efforts in educating teachers and students about domestic violence, teen dating abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse.

The Office of Faith Formation has trained over 1,500 educators and students in its “Save the Date” program, a teen-dating anti-violence curriculum as well as supporting Family Violence Project educational conferences. “The Diocese of Orange school system is breaking new ground when it comes to abuse education and prevention programs. Mater Dei High School alone had 366 sophomore students and seven teachers taking part in its anti-violence educational curriculum this year,” said Jesse Rutherford, family violence project content director.

“Save the Date” is an activity-based curriculum developed by the Family Violence Project centered on building healthy teen-dating relationships. This program was developed in response to a needs assessment conducted in local Orange County high schools, which concluded that 1/3 of all teens report experiencing some kind of abuse in their relationships. “Save the Date” teaches teens to recognize abuse, the warning signs of abuse, and how abuse is manifested in teenage dating relationships. The program walks them through the steps of accessing appropriate help for themselves or friends. “Save the Date” also teaches the students about gender stereotypes and focuses on building self-esteem.

The Family Violence Project’s educational conferences are full-day training sessions held several times throughout the year. At each conference, participants have the opportunity to hear presentations from experts in the field of family violence, ask questions of guest speakers, interact with professional service providers, and receive professional resource materials.

The Diocese of Orange currently requires all new school teachers to enroll in the program. The diocese is sending 200 faculty and administrators from its schools to the upcoming event. This is the largest group in attendance from any organization. The educator’s conference focuses on familiarizing teachers and other professionals with their responsibilities as mandated reporters. “We feel it is crucial for our teachers and administrators to recognize all types of abuse and respond appropriately. The Diocese of Orange is working hard to be at the forefront of abuse education in our schools,” said Sally Todd, associate superintendent of schools.

The Office of Faith Formation has also implemented “Breaking the Silence”, a DVD created especially for students attending diocesan high schools and those young people who participate in its religious education and youth ministry programs. It is a powerful tool utilizing an interactive DVD format to encourage teens to talk about sexual abuse and to recognize the warning signs of potential

abuse. Teens typically are not comfortable talking about sexual abuse and it is their silence and shame that makes it easier for offenders to continue grooming their targets.

“Breaking the Silence” is unique because the format features teens delving into this sensitive topic from their perspective. Included are five major topic areas: recognizing “grooming” techniques used by sexual abusers, learning to trust one’s own instincts about inappropriate adult behavior, exposing widespread myths about sexual abuse, reporting sexual abuse to authorities, and personal accounts of the suffering and psychological distress that affects victims and their families.

“As a Diocese we are blessed to receive recognition for the comprehensive work we are doing to educate our students and teachers about abuse. We have pledged to continue our diligence in protecting children and young people in the Diocese of Orange,” said Most Rev. Tod D. Brown, Bishop of Orange.

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