

**Special points of interest:**

Lessons in Giving

"News from the Director"

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To Protect

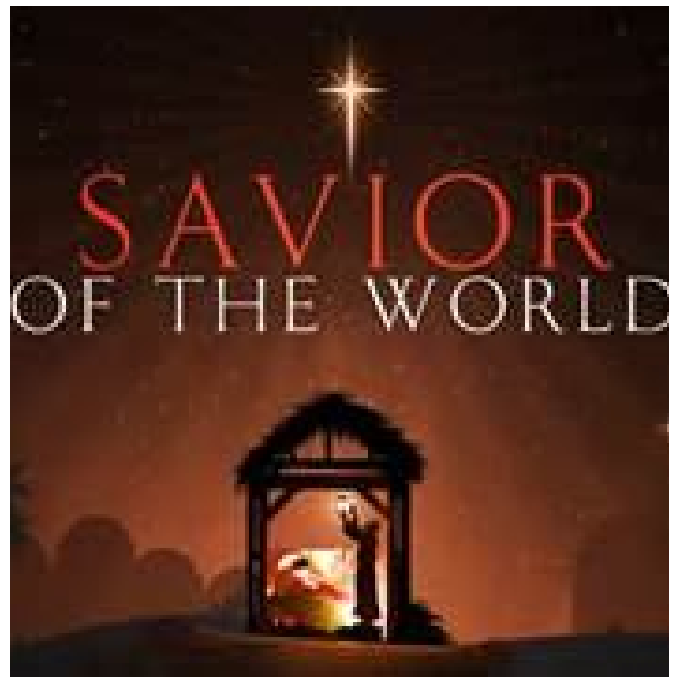
Office of Victim Assistance &
Safe Environment

Merry Christmas

Christmas is such a beautiful time of year. It's a time of hope, love, and family. It's also a time for us to come together and celebrate our faith. As the air gets colder and the Christmas decorations go up, it is hard not to feel blessed.

This is also a time to remember all those who are less fortunate. This is a time to get involved. We can make a difference in our community. Let this Christmas season be a reminder that Christ was born to give us hope. We too can provide hope to those in need.

Look around and see where you can help. There are so many community agencies that can use a hand this time of year. All it takes is one person to make a difference. Get involved and spread a message of hope and Christmas cheer!!



Dora Long: Facilitator of the Quarter

The Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment would like to congratulate Dora Long from St. Peter & Paul in New Braunfels for being the facilitator of the quarter. Dora has been an incredible addition to our facilitators and has accomplished an amazing job in this ministry. Dora has done a great job insuring that everyone is being trained at St. Peter & Paul and she is not hesitant to turn in her paperwork or to ask for help. She continues to demonstrate strength and commitment to educating adults

on abuse prevention. The Archdiocese of San Antonio and OVASE is incredibly proud to call Dora a valued volunteer.



2015-2016 Audit

It is with great pride that I announce that the Archdiocese of San Antonio has passed the 2015-2016 audit by the USCCB. Every year, the USCCB has an independent auditing agency ensure that we are compliant with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This year, the audit consisted of a review of our training and background check databases and interviews with members of the clergy and diocesan administration.

The Archdiocese is committed to healing those who have been hurt by the clergy and to protecting children/youth from harm. These annual audits allow the Archdiocese of San Antonio to review our policies and procedures and to see where are shortcomings reside. Though we passed, we will continue to adapt, grow, and strive for perfection.

HOLIDAY BLUES

When many of us think of Christmas, we get images of family, love, and togetherness. Sadly, for many people, including survivors of abuse, the holiday season is the worst time of the year. These individuals do not see the hope of the holiday season, only the despair.

Every year, starting in November, the calls to the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment almost double. We get many individuals who experience seasonal depression due to the stress and anxiety brought on by the holidays. For those who were abused by family, depression during the holidays can be stifling. These individuals struggle with the idea of surrounding themselves with friends and family. This leads to isolation which increases the feelings of depression. Depression does not have to be a death sentence. Here are a few ways to lessen the sting of depression:

1. Keep your expectations modest

Remember not to get hung up on what the holidays are supposed to be like and how you're supposed to feel. If you're comparing your holidays to some abstract greeting card ideal, they'll always come up short. Remember the real reason for this holiday season is to rejoice the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He loves you very much and came to give us Eternal Life.

2. Avoid negativity

Many survivors of child abuse try to gather with family and find themselves feeling re-victimized by those family members who continue to abuse others. Do not feel obligated to spend time with those who bring you down. Choose to limit the time around them or make your own new traditions with people who choose to respect you.

3. Do not isolate

Surround yourself with a network of close friends and family to turn to when things get tough. Isolation is the fuel for depression. Find someone to talk to. OVASE is always available for anyone in need.

4. Start new traditions

You can look at the holidays as a blank slate. If old family traditions bring about feelings of sadness, then start new traditions. Do not feel tied down to what you are "supposed to do".

5. Get involved

Take time to assist those in need this season. Volunteer at a toy drive, children's shelter, church ministries, battered women's shelter, etc. You could really find some comfort from it. Making a difference in other people's lives helps us to feel connected and isn't that what Christmas is truly about!



Lessons in Giving

By Paul Ashton, Psy.D., D.Min.

John the Baptist had the answer. He knew, he told, but we always seem to forget.

The build up to Christmas is a frenetic one. As the season hurries by, the pressures to get everything done to double-check that our lists are completed and make sure that no one has been forgotten become more intense. By the time the day itself arrives, many find themselves stressed to a point of exhaustion. Good intentions never accomplished become the first items on the list to be completed for next Christmas.

There is hope, though; right after Christmas the New Year brings the opportunity to make resolutions which often include promises to return to a simpler time of celebration where families spend more time together and less money on gifts for each other.

During that in-between week while waiting in store lines to exchange ill-fitting or unwanted gifts, the world is quick to snap us back into reality, however. We are encouraged to quit mourning our losses as we are confronted, encouraged, and even prodded with the St. Valentine hearts, chocolates, and decorations lining the isles that just a few days before held all the glitter that was Christmas. We try to remember how to keep Christ in Christmas, but we keep forgetting.

We move on throughout the year promising ourselves that next Christmas will be more enjoyable and less stressful. We can't go through all of that again, so we stock up on stocking stuffers and Christmas presents during our summer vacation at the outlet malls. We feel ahead of the game; this time we will be prepared. We are starting to remember how to do it, be prepared, but we still find something missing.

Before we know it, the leaves fall, Halloween comes and goes, the Thanksgiving turkey makes its final leftover appearance and the rush is on again. Christmas is coming quickly.

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior we pause to ponder God's great love for us as shown by our family, neighbors, and friends through gifts large and small. We feel God's love most especially as we spread it, and as we live the words of John the Baptist putting the emphasis not on ourselves, but on the One who is the Giver of all life.

Our many attempts to make others happy during the Christmas season is a living testimony to John the Baptist's powerful message that while we proclaim Christ we put Him first above all else, and, thus, we find that the truest joy is in giving and not receiving. Now we remember the answer!

Through giving, we find a freedom like no other which allows us to embrace the great gift of love that comes to us each and every Christmas. To feel that great love doesn't mean that we have to go back to a simpler time, place, and pace, it means that we simply need to realize that we are powerless without it in our life. We are nothing without God's power moving in and through us. When we empty ourselves of all desires to be in control, we become most powerful. When we make Christ the center of our focus and attention, we increase His love and decrease our own need and desires. In the decreasing of what we think we need and want, we find that we gain so much more and that our own increases are multiplied in ways that are difficult to number.

John the Baptist came as a herald in a line of many messengers that came before him pointing the direct way to the answer. Not just any answer, the answer. Jesus must increase; I must decrease.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas of many increases throughout the year, may our combined efforts to decrease gain for all of us, most especially the children and vulnerable persons to whom we minister, a Christmas peace and love that embraces us, protects us, and reminds us that we gain all when we give totally of ourselves.

Scheduled Training

January February March

25th St. Paul Community Center-Annex 6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training	2nd St. Paul Community Center-Annex 930am-4pm Virtus Facilitator Training	8th St. Paul Community Center-Annex 6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training
18th St. Paul Community Center-Annex 6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training	8th St. Paul Community Center-Annex 6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training	22nd St. Paul Community Center-Annex 6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training
	22nd St. Paul Community Center-Annex 6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training	

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

2016 has been an amazing year for the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment. There has been a great deal of change and growth throughout the ministry.

One of the largest changes in this ministry was the adoption of a new training curriculum. The switch to Virtus was painstaking at first, however, the benefits have been amazing. We've had to retrain all the coordinators (now facilitators) and introduce this training program throughout the Archdiocese. We started in February and a month in, we saw the training numbers begin to grow. With the addition of an online option, our training numbers have grown exponentially. In a less than 10 months, we have trained over 6000 adults!

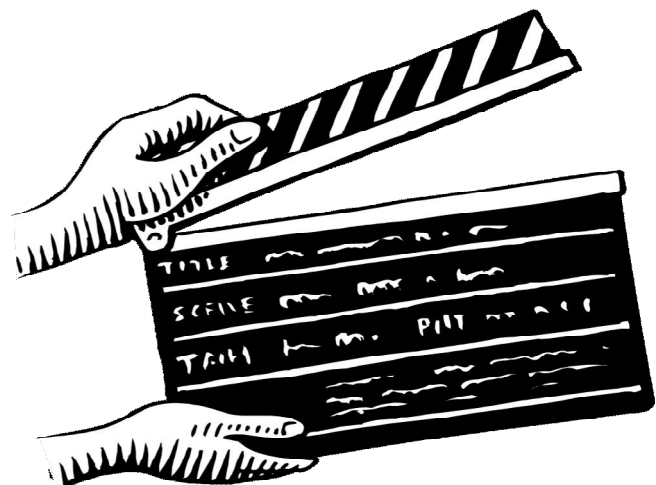
Another big change for OVASE was Tracie Enriquez stepping down as the Associate Director. Tracie had been my associate for a long time and she shared many of her talents and strengths with this office. Though it was sad to see Tracie go, it does allow the office to bring in fresh eyes and ideas. We have had some amazing candidates apply for the position. I should be announcing a new Associate Director before the start of the new year.

This year we did have our onsite audit by the USCCB. As was stated earlier in this newsletter, we passed with flying colors. Thank you for all the hard work you do to ensure that everyone is getting trained on abuse prevention.

Though we passed, we must still continue to thrive to be the best we can be. As long as children continue to be abused, we must continue the fight.

Thank you,

-Steve Martinez





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