

ELDER ABUSE & CLERGY



NEW STATE LAW AFFECTS CLERGY

Rita Yeates is a confused and incontinent 91-year-old woman who is cared for by her granddaughter. On one occasion she was found in saturated adult diapers, and on another, she was restrained with ropes around her waist and had several small cuts over her eye. While the granddaughter appears to care a great deal for her grandmother and tries hard to meet her needs, Mrs. Yeates requires around-the-clock care.

Statistics uncover a frightening picture of elder abuse, like what is happening to Mrs. Yeates. One of every 20 elderly people will be a victim of neglect or physical, sexual, psychological, or financial abuse this year.

By the year 2020, the number of elderly is expected to double. As the elderly population multiplies, so will the incidence of elder abuse ... if we don't take action. Without intervention, abuse almost always escalates. Because victims are often reluctant to report, an elderly person's well-being may depend on you to recognize and report suspected abuse.

Unlike other community leaders, clergy are involved intimately in the personal lives of their congregants and often visit private homes and long-term care facilities. Lawmakers recognize this unique role of clergy, so June 17, 2002 the Governor signed a bill **requiring religious leaders to report any suspected cases of abuse of seniors** or dependent adults.

Like the child abuse reporting mandate, the new law specifies that failure to report suspected adult abuse can be prosecuted and result in a fine and/or possible imprisonment. The legislators obviously are serious about protecting our seniors and any vulnerable adults 18-64 who might be dependent on another person for their care. We people of faith should be just as serious!

If you are worried about the health or safety of an older or dependent adult, call California's 24-hour hotline, 1-800-510-2020, for intervention, consultation and resources.