



ST. MARK *the* EVANGELIST  
CATHOLIC CHURCH

Our Mission

To invite all on our journey to

**L**earn

**O**rar(pray)

**G**iVe

**E**vangelize

**Parent/Student Handbook**  
**Faith Formation**  
**2021-2022**

**Faith Formation Mission Statement:** To bridge the gap between the Domestic Church and parish community by inviting all families on their journey to Discipleship.



**Vision:** To be the best source of encouragement and support so all families would be inspired to be fully active in lifelong faith formation.

**Goal:** We provide guidance, resources, and support directed to help everyone strengthen their relationship with God and His Church as they grow in love, in faith, and in understanding of our Catholic teachings.

**STAFF**

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## **Policies**

### **A. Privacy:**

The Faith Formation office keeps records of a confidential nature: Attendance, discipline, last grade completed, address, phone number, date of birth, sacraments received, marital status of parents, disabilities, and emergency contact information. The Faith Formation office abides by the Privacy Act and will not disclose personal information to third parties without written permission from the persons involved. Parents and/or guardians have a right to review any records kept by the Faith Formation office pertaining to their child for any reason. Catechists are provided limited access to personal information as is necessary for them to perform their ministry. Such information would include: last grade completed, disciplinary records, address, phone number, emergency contacts, disability, and other family information when it is appropriate. The Faith Formation office abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, we will provide the non-custodial parent with unofficial copies of records when such records are requested. If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given, it is the responsibility of the parent to provide the Director of Faith Formation with an official copy of the court order.

### **B. Communication:**

The Faith Formation office, along with the Church Universal, strives to maintain open communication with all who participate in Faith Formation sessions. We also encourage catechists and parents to keep each other informed of student progress through informal contact at the beginning and end of each class time. From time to time it may be necessary for parents to discuss issues of concern with the Catechist or the Director of Faith Formation. In keeping with Church teaching and the Biblical tradition of subsidiarity, issues of concern should be resolved at the lowest possible level. Parents/guardians should attempt to resolve any issues with a Catechist by first contacting the Catechist and discussing the issue. If satisfactory progress is not made, then the parents/guardians may contact the Director of Faith Formation to discuss the issue and request that action be taken. The primary mode of communication is through email. We ask that you make sure that you add us to your contact list so our emails do not go to spam. We will also utilize Remind. This is a communication system that allows us to send notifications to you through text messaging. Please make sure to update your information by logging into My Own Church or by contacting the Faith Formation office via email.

### **C. Hurricane/Tornado Plan for Program Cancellation:**

Should a tropical storm/hurricane or tornado be forecast to hit our area over a weekend, it may be necessary for Faith Formation sessions to be cancelled. The decision to cancel sessions during the week will be based on the Hillsborough/Pasco County School system's decision to cancel public school classes. If public schools are closed due to weather on a Monday, Faith Formation sessions will also be cancelled.

### **D. Safety:**

- All Catechists, co-leaders, and any steward who will interact with children are required to complete a Diocesan Safe Environment training and fingerprinting procedure.
- Restroom use: Parents are asked to take their children to the restroom before class to minimize the need for restroom use during class time. During class hours, the restrooms in the Faith Formation office wing are for student use only. Adults are to use the restrooms in the lobby.
- All Classroom doors are locked from the inside. (Children and Catechist will always be able to exit the rooms. This is to prevent someone who is not invited from entering into the rooms. Entry into the classrooms after the start of class is not allowed unless the parent receives a Late Slip. The parent will show the late slip through the window of the door and the catechist will allow the child in.

### **E. Sickness or Injury:**

If a child gets sick or hurt, the Catechist or the assistant will bring the child to the Faith Formation office. The parents or the emergency contact person will be called and asked to pick up the child from the office. If neither party can be reached, the child will stay in the office. If the child feels better or has no visible injury, he or she has the option of going back to class until time to go home. If your child is showing signs of sickness (fever, runny nose, vomiting, cough, etc.) please do NOT bring him/her to class. Children will be able to make up work when they are feeling better.

### **COVID-19 Procedures for In-parish Sessions**

If a child or adult has a temperature of 100.4 or higher and/or shows symptoms related to COVID-19 they will not be permitted into the building.

#### **Procedures that may be implemented for in parish faith formation:**

- temperature check and screening prior to entering building
- parent filling out self screening form for their children coming to in parish sessions and handing in each week.
- masks might need to be worn inside buildings
- hand sanitization prior to entering classrooms
- water fountains will remain closed
- children will bring their own water
- social distancing guidelines in classrooms and hallways.
- one way walking in hallways especially during pick up and drop off.



**F. Drop Off and Dismissal** In order to keep our children safe and our dismissal timely, we have established the following procedures:

1. Parents must show access card in order to enter the building at both arrival and dismissal.
2. Parents must bring their child to the classroom and sign them in using the attendance form.
3. Parents must not drop off their children until the catechist is present in the classroom. If the catechist is not present when they arrive, they should wait with their child.
4. If you are running late and class has begun you must get a late slip from the office or hall monitor in order to enter the classroom.
5. Parents are to pick up their child at the classroom and sign them out.
6. Children are not to be released from the classroom until the parent picks them up and signs the form.
7. If a child has not been picked up by the time the catechist leaves, the catechist is to bring the child and sign in sheet to the Faith Formation Office.

**G. Attendance:**

Regular attendance is very important and expected. We understand that from time to time circumstances or illnesses come up. "Regular" or "Adequate" Faith Formation Attendance is at least 75% (present or by make up work). All work for Home-Based Faith Formation must be completed & handed in no later than April 30. If we notice a pattern of absences we will contact you via email. This will be done out of courtesy but please remember that it is your responsibility to keep track of your child's attendance. Make-up work is available. You will need to contact your child's Catechist, who will give you make-up work to complete at home. Completed make-up work must include your child's name, date absent, grade level, and class session/teacher. We will excuse your child's absence after completed make-up work has been submitted to the Faith Formation Office. We will recognize perfect attendance at the end of the year. In order for a child to qualify they must be present at 100% of the Faith Formation sessions (no excused absences).

**H. Sacrament Preparation:**

Sacrament Preparation is in addition to regular Faith Formation. Proximate Sacrament Preparation occurs during the child's second (2) year of continuous Faith Formation (or enrollment in a Catholic School for 2 consecutive years) and when the child meets the minimum age/grade requirement. The Sacrament Request Form is separate from the Faith Formation Registration and must be filled out for each child. Children requesting Sacrament Preparation must have maintained adequate attendance in Faith Formation during the previous year and continue to maintain adequate attendance in Faith Formation during the year that they complete Proximate Sacrament Preparation. (See above for attendance requirements). In addition, parents are expected to attend 2 Parent Meetings (First Reconciliation/First Holy Communion), assist the child with the completion of the Sacrament books (received from the FF office), attend Mass each Sunday with their child, bring the child to First Reconciliation and attend 2 retreats with their child.

**I. Behavior Policy:**

The learning environment at any session/class sponsored by the Faith Formation Office will take to heart the need to provide a safe, enjoyable environment for all students/parents who will be involved. The Catechists and Staff will treat each and every participant with the dignity, love, and care that they deserve as the creations of God that they are. In any instance where a child is under the supervision of a Catechist/Adult Volunteer in association with Faith Formation Ministries, all participants will be treated as is described in our Safe Environment standards document.

1. Students are taught and expected to respect the sanctity of life and uniqueness of all persons. This means that:
  - Differences among all people are to be accepted and respected as Jesus has taught. Children are taught and expected to be mindful of their words and actions, so they are not a source of pain to others.
  - Teachers deserve full support and cooperation. This includes listening, following directions, and participating in the activities of the class by all students.
  - Any words or actions which show disrespect for the dignity of a person will not be permitted.
2. Students are expected to have a responsible and Christian attitude regarding proper attire and decorum while on church property.
  - Students will not be permitted to wear inappropriate clothing or hats, or chew gum.
  - Telephones or other electronic devices not required for class are not permitted. Any electronic device will be kept in a visible area (prayer table, for example) and returned to the student when class ends.
3. Respect for parish/school property should reflect a sense of good stewardship. Respect toward property, whether the parish's, another student's, or a student's own, is required at all times.
4. Students who interfere with others' rights to achieve the above goals by being disrespectful or persistently disruptive will be brought to the faith formation office. The Director will speak to the student and see how they can resolve the issue. If it continues and the student needs to be brought to the office 3 times, then the parent will receive a phone call and the child will need to be picked up.

**J. Right to Amend:**

This handbook is primarily a means of communication. It is meant to provide you, the family, with helpful information on how we intend to go about our ministry. St. Mark the Evangelist Faith Formation reserves the right to amend this handbook as necessary. Families will be notified, in writing, if changes are made to any procedures or information contained in this handbook.

## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

within the Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL

The first premise of this code is that children and youth function best when behaviors and expectations are clearly defined. It is accepted that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children in all aspects of their development. This experience aims at developing upright citizens and good Christians, following the new commandment Jesus gave His disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another." (John 13:34-35) In Timothy 4:12, we read, "Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity." Timothy is urged to rely on the gifts he has received from God. This code urges our children and youth to rely on God's gifts to them, especially charity, chastity and purity. This calls the



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young person to acknowledge and promote one's personal dignity and the rights that go with it. It becomes important for children and youth to know the difference between "right" and "not right" relationships. "Right" relationships foster personal, spiritual, and emotional growth, e.g., the ability to communicate, to forgive, to show affection, to be honest, vulnerable, dependable, etc. "Not right" relationships become harmful and hurtful, and even abusive. Abuse occurs when someone does not respect another's boundaries, uses power, tricks, threats, or violence to cross or change another's boundaries, or inflicts hurtful or unwanted behavior (physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual) on another person. This code is used in conjunction with existing local or diocesan policies, protocols or other codes and is not intended to supersede them. When engaging in formal and informal activities, functions, and programs, children and youth are expected to behave appropriately at all times, respecting the rights of others.

1. Christian behavior is expected at all times.
2. Respect for individuals, the community and facilities being used is required.
3. Cooperation and self-control are necessary when participating in programs and activities.
4. Dress must be in accord with the activity and appropriate for a Christian environment.
5. Unacceptable behavior and lack of cooperation will not be tolerated, but will be addressed appropriately. Examples of unacceptable behavior are as follows, though not limited to:
  - a. disrespect for adults and peers
  - b. use of vulgar language or gesture, use of racial slurs
  - c. damaging of property
  - d. fighting or intent to injure others
  - e. constant disturbance of others at work or in an activity
  - f. cheating
6. Possession of weapons, possession, sale or use of alcohol or drugs are forbidden.
7. No child or youth has the right to treat another in any manner that will cause physical or emotional pain. Therefore, harassment of any kind is unchristian and unacceptable.
8. Coercion or threats to do something physically hurtful or for the purpose of exposing someone or something about another is unacceptable behavior.
9. Chastity is a virtue to be held in high esteem and promoted in practice. Sexual abuse of any sort, coercing a person to engage in sexual acts against her or his will, physically touching the sexual parts of another's body, treating a person like a sexual object are unacceptable and abusive behavior. Consensual sex between students or initiated by minors to adults must never occur.



# Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

(Revised and Approved February 2018)

## INTRODUCTION

The Diocese of St. Petersburg is committed to the well-being of those served by the Church. The People of God have a right to be able to trust those who minister to them in God's name. The violation of this trust through Sexual Abuse by any Church Personnel is a source of great physical, mental and emotional pain for those involved and for the entire Church community. The Diocese published its first policy for the protection of Children and Youth on June 10, 1991, which required both Employees and Volunteers who work with Children and Youth in any parish or Catholic School program to complete written employment or Covered Volunteer applications respectively for service with accompanying references. Beginning April 15, 1992, the diocese required background screening and fingerprinting of all Employees who have the care, responsibility, and/or supervision of Children and Youth.

In July 1997, the Province of Miami required all dioceses to add Vulnerable Adults to the protected classes of Children and Young People. Background screening, reference checking, fingerprinting, and written employment and Covered Volunteer applications were now required of those desiring to work or volunteer with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults. In November of 2001, contractors and vendors were added to the list of those requiring background screening. In June 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) adopted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Charter)*, which required background screening and Safe Environment Program training for all who may have the care, responsibility, and/or supervision of Children and young people. The USCCB obtained confirmation by the Holy See for the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies* dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by priests or deacons in November 2002. The Diocese of St. Petersburg revised its policy to comply with the *Charter* and the *Essential Norms* in December 2002 and again in May 2006 in response to the first revision of the *Charter* in 2005. The diocese publishes this revision as a response to the second revision of the *Charter* in 2011 and of its current policy as part of a continuing commitment to its pastoral responsibilities and to the gospel. This revised policy in combination with procedures and guidelines provides for the implementation and enforcement of a safe environment for our Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

## POLICY AND SCOPE

**Policy to Protect.** The Bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg will make every reasonable effort to prevent Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, and to respond promptly to all credible Allegations of abuse. As such, the Diocese of St. Petersburg will comply with all obligations of civil and canon law and will promote healing where it is needed, provide education, training and guidance when it is appropriate, and endeavor to prevent any Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults with firm justice and mercy towards all. No person, including Clergy, who has been determined to have engaged in Sexual Abuse of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult, will be allowed to remain in active ministry. Such actions violate Christian principles and are outside the scope of duties and employment of all Church Personnel. The diocese will not tolerate such behavior. This policy applies to all diocesan entities and their

Contractors and Vendors to include parishes, schools, early childhood centers, and associated activities within the diocese. Care will always be taken to protect the rights of all parties involved, particularly those of the person claiming to have been sexually abused and the person against whom the charge has been made. When the accusation has been proved to be unfounded, every reasonable step will be taken to restore the good name of the person falsely accused.

**Policy to Respond to Allegations.** The Diocese of St. Petersburg will respond promptly to any Allegation where there is reason to believe that Sexual Abuse of a Minor has occurred. The diocese will utilize an objective outside investigator to investigate any such Allegations. The diocese will maintain a Victim Assistance Minister to coordinate assistance for the immediate pastoral care of persons who report Sexual Abuse incidents that occurred when they were Minors by Clergy or other Church Personnel. The procedures for those making a complaint are readily available on the Internet via the Diocese of St. Petersburg website at <https://www.dosp.org/safe-environment/how-to-file-an-abuse-complaint/>  
**Toll Free Contact Number for the Diocesan Victim Assistance Minister: 1-866-407-4505**

Personnel or contractors who perform services under Title I or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and who are employed or contracted by the public school district to perform those services for parentally-placed private school students are vetted and screened in compliance with § 1012.465 and 1012.467, Florida Statutes, the "Jessica Lunsford Act" (JLA), which requires Level II fingerprint and screening by the public district. This screening consists of a Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)/Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) search. All such individuals are required to have the statewide JLA badge and appropriate, visible identification while present at any Catholic school to which they are assigned. The Diocese of St. Petersburg will accept a written statement from the public school district verifying that any and all personnel employed by or contracted through the public school district to perform these educational services have successfully completed this screening.

**Policy to Report.** The Diocese of St. Petersburg will report an Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a person who is a Minor or Vulnerable Adult to the appropriate civil authorities. The diocese will comply with all applicable civil laws with respect to the reporting of Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults and will cooperate in the civil authorities' investigation in accord with Florida state law<sup>[i]</sup>. The diocese will cooperate with civil authorities about reporting cases even when the alleged victim is no longer a Minor. In every instance, the diocese will advise those who allege abuse of their right to make a report to civil authorities and support this right.

Call in all reports of actual or suspected abuse to the local law enforcement agency (911) or to the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) Abuse Hotline Registry: 1-800-96ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).

Any person who knows or suspects child abuse, abandonment, or neglect and who knowingly and willfully fails to do so, or who knowingly and willfully prevents another person from doing so, commits a felony of the third degree, punishable by one year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

**Policy on the Diocesan Review Board.** The Diocese of St. Petersburg Diocesan Review Board functions as a confidential consultative body to the bishop. The majority of its members will be lay persons not in the employ of the diocese in accordance with *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons, 2006*. This board will assist the Diocesan Bishop in assessing Allegations and fitness for ministry, and will regularly review Diocesan Policies and Procedures for dealing with Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults. Also, the Board can act both retrospectively and prospectively on these matters and give advice on all aspects of responses required in connection with these cases.

**Policy on Removal of a Priest or Deacon from Ministry.** Sexual Abuse of a Minor by a cleric is a crime in the universal law of the Church (*CIC*, c. 1395 §2; *CCEO*, c. 1453 §1). Those who habitually lack the use of reason, regardless of age, are to be equated with Minors (*CIC*, c.99). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Motu proprio, *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, 2001, revised 2010) has reserved this jurisdiction because of the seriousness of this matter. Even after a single act of Sexual Abuse of a Minor— whenever it occurred—which is admitted or established after an appropriate process in accord with canon law and the *Essential Norms*, the offending priest or deacon is to be permanently removed from ministry and, if warranted, dismissed from the clerical state. If an Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor is made against the bishop, the Apostolic Nuncio shall be notified and the investigation shall proceed according to his direction. The Diocese of St. Petersburg will follow the requirements of the universal law of the Church and the *Essential Norms* approved by the USCCB, along with all state and federal laws concerning the protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

**Policy on the Standards of Ministerial Behavior.** The Diocese of St. Petersburg will maintain standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for Clergy and for any other paid personnel and Volunteers of the church in positions of trust who have the care, responsibility, and or supervision of Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults. This policy can be viewed on the diocesan website at <https://www.dosp.org/safe-environment/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/Practical-Standards-of-Professional-Responsibility-for-Priests-.pdf>

**Policy on Communications.** The Diocese of St. Petersburg will be open and transparent in communicating with parish, other church communities, and the public about Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals **involved**.

**Policy on Distribution.** A copy of this policy will be distributed to all diocesan entities in printed form for posting to the general public. This policy will also be posted on the diocesan website at

<https://www.dosp.org/safe-environment/policy-for-the-protection-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults/>

**Policy on Background Screening.** The Diocese of St. Petersburg require that all Church Personnel, candidates for ordination, Contractors, and Vendors who may have the care, responsibility, and or supervision of Children undergo a Level 2 FDLE/FBI Criminal History Background Screening, currently using the Volunteer, Employee Criminal History System (VECHS) and must meet the Diocese of St. Petersburg Minimum Standards of Moral Conduct. Employees must also receive a Level 2 background check as a condition of employment. The Safe Environment Program Office is responsible for administering the background screening function for the diocese.

The FBI requires that background checks only be used for the purpose intended. Therefore, the diocese does not accept FBI background checks or background checks run by other entities for other purposes. The diocese does not accept proof of Level 2 background checks or letters from other entities certifying a Level 2 background check.

All Church Personnel, candidates for ordination, Contractors and Vendors who may have the care, responsibility, and or supervision of Children will be required to undergo a Criminal History Background Screening conducted by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and the FBI Volunteer & Employee Criminal History System (VECHS) every five years.

Church Personnel who move from one entity to another within the Diocese of St. Petersburg with no break in service must submit a personal request in writing to the Safe Environment Program Office asking that proof of his or her background check be transferred from the losing entity to the gaining entity or entities. If there is a break in service, a re-screening must take place.

Background Screening Reports and Clearance Letters for employees and covered volunteers will be secured in locked containers at the respective parishes, schools, or other diocesan entities. Only the parish pastor, the school principal, diocesan entity head or their specifically-authorized delegates will have access to these records.

Copies of Contractor Criminal History Records and Background Screening Reports will be kept on file and secured at the Diocesan Safe Environment Program Office. Contractor/vendor employers will only receive clearance or non-clearance letters for their employees.

**Policy on the Diocesan Safe Environment Program (SEP) Training.** Under Article 12 of the *Charter*, the Safe Environment Program Office is responsible for the administration of Safe Environment Program Training. The Diocese of St. Petersburg will require SEP training of all Church Personnel, Contractors, Vendors, and candidates for ordination who may have the care, responsibility, and or supervision of Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults. These individuals must complete the required SEP training, which is offered online. This training expires five years from the initial date of training and also qualifies the recipient for employment or volunteer ministries which involve the care, responsibility, or supervision of Vulnerable Adults. SEP training re-certification is required every 5 years thereafter.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound and Pastoral Care Providers who wish to have the care, responsibility, and or supervision of Vulnerable Adults must complete the online Safe Environment Program, in addition to the training required for those who exercise this ministry. This training expires 5 years from the initial date of training and also qualifies the recipient for employment or volunteer ministries which involve the care, responsibility, or supervision of Children. SEP re-certification is required every 5 years thereafter.

The diocese does not accept safe environment program training from other archdioceses, dioceses or eparchies because state laws, policies, procedures, and program jargon differ. Individuals coming into the Diocese of St. Petersburg must complete the online Safe Environment Program training.

The Safe Environment Program Office will oversee training and education in cooperation with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations. It will require education and training for Children, Youth, parents, ministers, educators, Volunteers, Contractors and Vendors to make and maintain a safe environment for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

The Diocesan Safe Environment Program Office is also responsible for maintaining a central database that will track the training and background screening status on all program participants. Appropriate staff members of parishes, schools and other diocesan entities are to inform those persons requiring 5-year recertification training prior to the expiration of their 5-year certification period.

Clergy and religious who will be engaging in ministry within the Diocese of St. Petersburg for a period of 30 days or less, including those charged with the care, responsibility and supervision of Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults, must comply with this Policy, unless a statement of suitability from the individual's diocese or religious institute, with verification of his/her completion of that diocese's or institute's Safe Environment Program training and background screening with no criminal history is submitted to the Diocese of St. Petersburg prior to engagement in ministry.

Lay presenters who will be engaging in ministry for 30 days or less by providing seminars, workshops or retreats in the Diocese of St. Petersburg and will be charged with the care, responsibility or supervision of Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults, must comply with the requirements of this Policy, unless a statement of suitability from their diocese with verification of his/her completion of that diocese's Safe Environment Program training and background screening with no criminal history is submitted to the Diocese of St. Petersburg prior to engagement in ministry; or the lay presenter submits to the Diocese prior to engagement in ministry a copy of a Criminal History Background Screening acceptable to the Diocese, showing no criminal history and is current within 5 years.



## Definitions

**Adult:** An individual who is 18 years or older and who is no longer in high school.

**Allegation:** A statement or accusation of abuse, especially Sexual Abuse

**Care, Responsibility and or Supervision:** Unsupervised access by members of the Clergy and/or Religious Institutes, Seminarians, Lay Persons, Employees, Covered Volunteers, Vendors or Contractors to any Child or Vulnerable Adult participating in any ministry or activity of the Diocese or any parish, school or other diocesan entity. This includes clergy, members of religious institutes, seminarians and lay persons.

**Child, Youth, or Minor:** A person less than eighteen (18) years of age unless emancipated by law. Minors and the combined term "Children and Youth" are used interchangeably.

**Church Personnel shall mean all of the following:**

**Clergy:** All priests and deacons who possess or desire faculties for ministry in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

**Contractors and Vendors:** This class of persons shall be understood for purposes of this policy and in accordance with the VECHS User Agreement to include Contractors, Vendors, Licensees, Consultants, and Memo of Understanding (MOU) personnel who have unsupervised access to Children, disabled or elderly persons for whom the diocese provides care, responsibility and/or supervision.

**Covered Volunteer:** Any unpaid person who is engaged or involved in any diocesan institution or parish activity, and who is entrusted with the care, responsibility, or supervision of Children or Vulnerable Adults. Covered Volunteers must be 18 years of age or older and are not in high school. Individuals younger than 18 years old are not permitted to assume the primary care, responsibility and/or supervision of Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults, although they may be permitted to assist an adult who meets the criteria to do so.

**Criminal History Background Screening:** An investigation of an individual's background that may be contained in the public record to include municipal, county, state, federal law enforcement, Social Security and state driving records. The Diocese currently conducts its screening through VECHS but reserves the right to use other third-party professionals.

**Employee:** Any lay individual who is employed by or engaged in ministry with the Diocese, Parish, School or other entity affiliated with the Diocese of St. Petersburg, who receives compensation for services (regardless of form) rendered in which the obligation to withhold for payroll tax (FICA, Medicare, and withholding) exists, whether part-time or full-time. All Employees, even those under 18 years of age (14 – 17 years of age) are subject to background screening as a condition of employment. Parental consent is not required in the state of Florida to sign the FDLE VECHS Waiver/Agreement. "Personnel" as defined herein, has reference only to the applicability of this policy and is not indicative of any agency or employment relationship between the diocese and the party whose compliance with this policy is sought.

**Pastoral Care Providers:** Volunteers who are entrusted with the care, responsibility and supervision of any Child or Vulnerable Adult, who provide various types of service and assistance to the sick and shut-in as a form of ministry. Types of ministry-in-service may include but are not limited to Vehicle Drivers, Errand Runners, Bereavement Ministers, Care Givers, Pastoral Ministers, Health Ministers, Helping with Chores, etc.

**Qualified Entity:** The Diocese of St. Petersburg is a Qualified Entity within the FDLE Employee, Volunteer Criminal History System (VECHS).

**Sexual Abuse:** Any act as defined by Chapter 39 and Chapter 415 of the Florida Statutes.

**Vulnerable Adult:** A person as defined by Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes.

## End notes:

[1] The statutory confidentiality of privileged communications established in Section 90.505, F.S., shall be observed when applicable to all reporting required under this paragraph. Section 90.505, F.S. establishes a privilege with respect to communications to Clergy, if made privately for the purposes of seeking spiritual counsel and advice from a member of the Clergy in the usual course of practice or discipline and not intended for further disclosure.

## **IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION**

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Diocesan Victim Assistance Minister (toll-free):

(866) 407-4505

Diocesan Safe Environment Program Office:

(727) 344-1611, ext. 5377

Florida Department of Children & Families Abuse Hotline Registry (toll-free):

(800) 962-2873

Local Law Enforcement Agency:

911



## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ADULTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN within the Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL

### K.

#### **Introduction**

The Catholic Church in west central Florida is blessed with a great diversity of persons created in the divine image. We respect, honor and celebrate the Image of God revealed in human uniqueness, dignity and diversity, as suggested in Genesis 1:27: "On the sixth and last day of the creation, God created a man to His own Image: to the Image of God He created him". We believe that every child is a gift from God from the moment of conception. We believe that the children enrolled in our schools, parish religious education programs and other programs must be treated with dignity, respect and care, as described in "A Sacred Trust, The Safety of Our Children" (National Catholic Education Association, 2003). An adult involved in any role of a program is defined as a person who is at least twenty-one years of age, and who has been approved to work with young people by the pastor, principal, community organization leader or a designate. (McCarthy, 2002 a). We serve all young people without regard to gender, creed, national origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, political beliefs or disabilities. All adults working with youth in any capacity must be approved through the proper background checks and screening as required by the Diocese of St. Petersburg. This code is not intended to otherwise limit the expectation of staff, children, students, and volunteers to engage fully in the traditions of teaching, celebrating, participating in and being formed by the Catholic faith, including but not limited to curriculum, catechesis, the sacraments, other liturgies, worship services, and ministries. This code is used in conjunction with existing diocesan policies, protocols or other codes and is not intended to supersede them.

#### **Professional Role**

1. Adults recognize the dignity of each person and refrain from behaviors or words that are disrespectful to anyone of any group.
2. Adults work collaboratively with the pastor, supervisors and associates in community, or school programs. These adults distinguish their own private opinions from those of the Catholic faith or their profession in all publicity, public announcements or publications.
3. Adults have a responsibility in all relationships to witness the chastity appropriate to their vocation in life, whether celibate, married, or single.
4. Adult leaders are competent and receive education and training commensurate with their role(s) and responsibilities working with youth. They are to be made aware of all diocesan policies for working with youth.
5. Adults are aware they have considerable personal power because of their position or ministry. Therefore, they will sustain respectful relationships, avoiding manipulation and other abuses of power.
6. Adults maintain appropriate professional boundaries, e.g., physical, sexual, relational and emotional. Appropriate use of time for working with, speaking with and engaging with children and youth is an important boundary. Adults are not to be available 24/7, but rather work within normal expected time frames.
7. Adults model healthy and positive behaviors with young children, adolescents, and other adults.

#### **Professional Accountability**

8. Adults must never engage in sexual intimacies or overt sexual behaviors with children and/or youth. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, covert or overt seductive speech or gestures that sexually abuses, exploits, or harasses another person.
9. Touching should be age appropriate and based on the need of the minor and not on the need of the adult. An adult is to avoid physical contact when alone with a minor. If a minor initiates physical contact, an appropriate, limited response is proper.
10. Procuring, providing, or using alcohol and/or controlled substances for or with youth is inappropriate and unethical.
11. Adults should never possess or use alcohol or drugs while supervising and/or participating in a youth activity.
12. Adults always meet with young people in areas that are visible and accessible.
13. One-on-one meetings with a young person are best held in a public area, or if that is not possible, then the door to the room is left open. Another adult is to be notified about the meeting whenever feasible. Notify parents of meetings.
14. It is always a preferred practice to have two adults present in the area where youth are present.
15. Driving alone with a young person should be avoided.
16. Adults are not to be alone with minors in a residence, sleeping facility, locker room, rest room, dressing facility, other closed room, or isolated area that is inappropriate to a ministry relationship.
17. Audiovisual, music, and print resources used in programs must be screened prior to use to ensure their appropriateness for the participants. It is never appropriate to use an "R" rated movie without parental consent or without screening for sexual content, nudity, language, violence, and themes or content which harm the dignity of the human person. Even "PB" movies should be reviewed carefully. Movies with ratings stronger than "R" are never appropriate. Music lyrics should also be reviewed to ensure their appropriateness. Parents should be informed of movies that will be used in conjunction with any program.
18. The computer and internet are acceptable and common means of communication and entertainment. Adults must never engage with sexually explicit and/or pornographic materials or chat rooms with children and youth. They should not use any computer software, games or any form of internet personal interaction or entertainment that could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents.
19. Adults are trained to be aware of the signs of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and neglect.
20. Adults are aware of their limitations with respect to paraprofessional counseling and will make appropriate referrals.
21. Adults agree to adhere to civil and ecclesial law, policy and procedure for reporting abuse, suspected abuse or neglect.
22. Adults are aware of and comply with all applicable parish, organizational and/or diocesan policies with special attention

## **6.1 Diocesan Harassment Policy**

### **Harassment Policy for Non-Employment Situations in Schools/Centers, Parish Religious Education and Parish Youth Ministry Programs of the Diocese of St. Petersburg**

#### **POLICY:**

The Diocese of St. Petersburg requires that each parish, Catholic school or early childhood center establish and adopt this policy that prohibits any form of harassment by any individual. The Diocese of St. Petersburg strives for the establishment of a Christian, professional and supportive educational environment for all persons engaged in or involved with religious education programs, schools and early childhood centers, and parish youth ministry programs in non-employment situations. No parish, school, or early childhood center will be responsible for off campus harassment, unless it occurs at a parish-, school-, or early childhood center-sponsored event.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE POLICY:**

The policy intends:

that each individual is free from physical, psychological or verbal intimidation and harassment in the schools, early childhood centers, religious education and youth ministry settings;

that each individual involved in schools, early childhood centers, religious education and youth ministry programs maintain and further develop attitudes and behaviors which express respect for others and are reflective of each persons' God-given dignity;

to encourage a heightened sensitivity toward behaviors that others may find offensive and intimidating, whether these behaviors refer to race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, familial status, veteran status or disability.

This policy is not intended to otherwise limit the expectation of staff, children, students and volunteers to engage fully in the traditions of teaching, celebrating, participating in and being formed by the Catholic faith, including but not limited to curriculum, catechesis, the Sacraments, other liturgies, worship services and ministries.

#### **EXPLANATION OF HARASSMENT:**

Harassment can result from a single incident or from a pattern of behavior involving verbal, written or physical conduct or communication.

Harassment encompasses a broad range of behaviors, which could include, but are not limited to:

- Physical, mental or verbal abuse
- Insults, jokes, or derogatory slurs based on one or more of an individual's protected status(es)
- Unwelcome sexual advances or touching
- Implicit or explicit requests for sexual favors
- Unwanted sexual comments (serious or humorous)
- Unwanted sexually suggestive telephone calls, letters, e-mail, etc.
- Comments or jokes based on issues of modesty and developing social awareness
- Unwanted forced involvement in activities (e.g., physical, religious, etc.)
- Coercion of religious styles or personal beliefs upon a participant
- Intimidation in front of a group of forced personal sharing in groups
- Inappropriate media or music use which would violate this policy

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The right to confidentiality, both of the complainant and of the accused, will be respected to the extent possible, but will be consistent with legal obligations and with the necessity to investigate allegations of misconduct and to take corrective action when this conduct has occurred.

