

Policy for the Safety & Protection of Children

St. Mary Parish
401 North St., Chardon OH
440-285-7051



Jesus said, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." Matt. 23:37

Parents are the primary educators of their children in matters of faith. When parents entrust their child to the Church for any of a variety of children's programs, we take that responsibility very seriously. We realize that the nurturing and protection of these impressionable young people is of paramount importance.

Building on the model of *"The Policy for the Safety of Children in Matters of Sexual Abuse: Revised, 2007,"* (Diocesan Policy) issued by the Diocese of Cleveland, the St. Mary Parish, Chardon, has established this policy to safeguard the spiritual, mental, and physical well being of all children and vulnerable adults in our care.

Periodically, the parish offers the diocesan-endorsed training on child sexual abuse awareness, "VIRTUS: Protecting God's Children," that is mandated for all employees and those who volunteer with children. This program is offered at many locations throughout the Cleveland Diocese and across the country. Parents who are not volunteers are also welcome to attend a VIRTUS class.

In addition, the program "Called To Protect" (CTP) is presented annually at the parish to instruct parents and children on personal safety; creation of safe environments for children; and child sexual abuse prevention. This multi-media program from Praesidium, Inc. educates children and youth from pre-school through grade 12 in the best age-appropriate methods for protecting themselves. Topics of a separate CTP presentation offered to parents include how abusers gain access to children; warning signs to look for in children and adults; and actions to take when noticed. Grandparents and caregivers are also welcome to attend the CTP presentation for adults.

I. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARISH

The parish will comply with all diocesan guidelines for children's safety that are specific to their role (school, PSR, VBS, etc.).

The parish is responsible for screening employees, and applicants who want to volunteer with children or youth. Required documents (*see Section II*) will be submitted directly to the parish Virtus Coordinator, who is responsible for maintaining the paper and digital records of those to whom this policy applies. Compliance information is reported to the diocese annually.

Areas of the building which are not to be accessed by visitors or children will be clearly designated.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEES

All parish and school employees must be in compliance with this policy, as well as the Diocesan Policy. In addition to attendance at a facilitator-led VIRTUS training and reading the monthly VIRTUS bulletins for at least two years, employees are required to complete three documents to be kept on file in the parish office:

- A signed Acknowledgment of the Diocesan Policy
- A signed Acknowledgment of the Standards of Conduct for Ministry
- A satisfactory Background Check (digital fingerprint report) from the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification & Investigation (BCII). For those who have resided outside of Ohio any time within the last five years, a satisfactory FBI (multi-state) Background Check is required.

Those who may become aware of suspicious behavior or any activity at the parish that is not consistent with this policy, please report your concerns to the adult(s) in charge of the activity; their supervisor; the member of the parish staff who oversees that activity; or the parish VIRTUS Coordinator. Those who have information to report and are not clear to whom it should be reported should call the police.

Anyone witnessing actual abuse should call the police / sheriff / 911 immediately.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEERS

Persons age 18 and older who meet the definition of volunteer must also satisfy the requirements of this policy, as stated above (Section II). As per the Diocesan Policy, a "Volunteer is anyone who works with children, without any express or implied promise of remuneration, more than (4) hours a month or who works with children more frequently than once a month...It does not include the occasional volunteer, such as a driver or chaperone for individual activities." (pg. 24)

Any employee or volunteer identified above who does not meet the requirements will not be permitted to work at the parish or supervise activities involving minor children.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS

Parents are encouraged to attend one of the "Called To Protect" presentation for adults that are offered annually. Parents must complete Emergency Contact information and inform the office whenever the information changes.

In cases where one parent is the custodial parent, it is the responsibility of that parent to provide in writing the applicable court documents to the member of St. Mary's Pastoral Staff overseeing the program that the child attends.

V. RESOURCES

The Diocesan Policy and Standards of Conduct for Ministry are downloadable PDFs available from:
<http://www.clevelandchildprotection.org/website/documents-policies.html>

Anyone preferring a printed copy of these documents, or the monthly Virtus bulletins should contact the parish Virtus Coordinator, Ms. Carol Burnett, 285-7051 x18, info@stmarychardon.org

An Application for Volunteers is available at St. Mary's Parish Office, the PSR Office, and on the parish website: www.stmarychardon.org