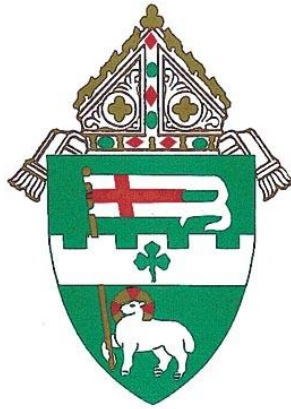


# Safe Environment Policy

“Affirming Our Integrity”



RC Diocese of Paterson

**777 Valley Road, Clifton, New Jersey 07013**

[www.rcdop.org](http://www.rcdop.org)

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**PURPOSE**

The purpose of these actions is to protect our children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. Program requirements such as these set a high standard of prevention/protection and discourage the abuser from attempting to participate in programs that serves children youth and/or vulnerable adults. Further, the purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth as established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

**POLICY**

It shall be the policy of the Diocese of Paterson that all persons over the age of 18 who have regular, recurring contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults ministering, working or volunteering in its parishes, schools, agencies and affiliated organizations/institutions are required to:

1. Undergo a criminal history background check as outlined in this policy.
2. Attend child abuse awareness/prevention programs as outlined in this policy.
3. Read, acknowledge and follow the Diocese’s “Code of Conduct”.

Anyone that was previously active in a ministry and wishes to return, if absent for more than three years will be required to have a new background check completed and re-acknowledge the Code of Conduct.

This policy does not apply to anyone utilizing a parish/school facility NOT affiliated, sponsored, chartered by the parish/school/agency, i.e., AA meetings, one time outside organization event/rental, outside organization meetings or outside organization church property leases. The Diocese may require any organization leasing church property that works with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults to submit a letter confirming that they are in compliance with all State Laws in regards to child protection. Any questions concerning this exemption should be referred to the Office of Child & Youth Protection.

In addition, any parish/school that hires or procures any organization to provide any outside youth ministry services to the parish/school (i.e. Youth ministry retreats, full day confirmation retreats, etc.) must ensure they have completed a background check and/or certify through the hiring agency that a background check has been performed.

## **OFFICE OF CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION (OCYP)**

Established at the Chancery is the Office of Child & Youth Protection (OCYP). The primary purpose of the Office is to ensure the Diocese is in full compliance with the Charter. The OCYP oversees and coordinates with all Local Youth Protection Coordinators (LYPC) to ensure that all compliance requirements as outlined in this policy, the social media policy, and the code of conduct are followed. The OCYP works with LYPC to help create a safe environment for our children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. In addition, the OCYP seeks best practices in working with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.

## **LOCAL YOUTH PROTECTION COORDINATORS (LYPC)**

Each parish/school and other affiliated institutions within the Diocese are required to appoint a local youth protection coordinator (LYPC). The LYPC will work closely with the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection to ensure compliance with USCCB Charter, this safe environment policy, social media policy, code of conduct as well as other policies established by the Diocese. LYPC are required to follow all procedures as outlined in the child protection procedure manual. The LYPC responsibilities include helping to ensure the parish/school is a safe environment for our children & youth

### **DUTIES OF THE LOCAL YOUTH PROTECTION COORDINATOR**

The Coordinator shall:

1. Compile and maintain a list of all employees and volunteers who have regular contact with minors and update the list as necessary.
2. Coordinate and facilitate the criminal history background checks for all such employees and volunteers.
3. Ensure all employees and volunteers have attended child abuse awareness training and acknowledge the code of conduct.
4. Monitor the results of the criminal history background checks and to assure all are completed.
5. Submit all information requested in the annual audit conducted by the Diocesan OCYP, respond to all other inquiries from Diocesan OCYP and prepare reports as requested by the Diocesan OCYP.
6. Sign a Confidentiality Agreement and submit it to the Director of the Diocesan OCYP.
7. Assist the Pastor/School administrator in following best practices to help ensure the facility is a safe environment for children.
8. Maintain all compliance records for all employees and volunteers.

## **CRIMINAL HISTORY BACKGROUND CHECKS**

**All Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and Candidates in Formation for the Permanent Diaconate,** living or ministering under the auspices of the Diocese of Paterson, will be fingerprinted using the NJ State Police Voluntary Review Office VRO process. This includes any priests, deacons, seminarians, and candidates in formation for the Permanent Diaconate engaging in any form of sacramental, catechetical, or parish ministry.

**Parishes/Other affiliated institutions:** All employees, volunteers and religious as outlined in this policy are required to have a background check completed using an internet background check service as specified by the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection prior to working with any child or youth.

**Schools:** All school employees are required by the New Jersey Department of Education to undergo a specific criminal background check which includes a fingerprint check through the State approved service provider.

All individuals who regularly volunteer in our schools are required to have a background check completed using an internet background check service as specified by the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection prior to working with any child or youth.

Persons who provide services from other organizations (reading therapist, speech therapist, landscapers, janitorial, etc.) must undergo a Department of Education background check unless covered by their own sending organizations. A copy of the clearance is to be provided to the school and retained.

This policy supersedes all others on this subject and no one is grandfathered by the length of service, i.e., all those who serve must have criminal history background checks regardless of when they started their ministry, employment of volunteer service in the Diocese. Employment, ministerial placement, or volunteer services is contingent upon favorable results of the background check.

The following lists are examples of the individuals for whom criminal history background checks must be run. We acknowledge that they are not exhaustive. Pastors/Administrators may decide that additional personnel must have criminal history background checks.

Volunteers under the age of 18 will not be required to have criminal history background checks but must be supervised by an adult who has had a criminal history background check when working with minors. Effective 2/1/2018 anyone who has completed a background check through the Selection.com, Fastrax will be automatically re-checked quarterly.

If any criminal conviction is returned, the *Diocese of Paterson policy for Criminal History Background Check Disqualification Policy* is to be followed.

Below are examples of positions that require a criminal history background check, but not limited to:

- Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians
- Directors/Coordinators of Religious Education
- Adults who train youth lectors
- Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) Catechists
- Rainbows for All God's Children personnel
- RCIA Adapted for Children ministers
- Special Events teams
- Children's Liturgy of the Word ministers
- Antioch/Search Adult Team Leaders
- Vacation Bible School teams
- Director of Youth Ministry/ Coordinator of Youth Ministry
- All chaperones, including all overnight retreat chaperones
- All regular volunteers working w/children
- Athletic Association Presidents/ Athletic Directors/ CYO Coordinators/All Coaches
- Music Directors
- Grounds and maintenance persons/Custodial Staff who have contact with children
- All nursery, child care or babysitting persons 18 and over must have criminal history background checks.<sup>1</sup>
- Catechists/Classroom Aides
- Non-Relative Confirmation Sponsors
- Hall monitors
- Adults who supervise babysitting during events or classes
- Anyone who provides transportation for minors
- All Scouting personnel for units chartered by the Parish
- Secretaries and other staff & personnel that have regular contact with children
- Volunteers who train altar servers or work with children's choirs
- Sacristans
- All tutors and mentors in school or religious education programs
- Principals/Teachers/Other school staff
- Family Promise/Homeless Shelter Volunteers

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<sup>1</sup> Those under 18 who perform such services should be supervised by an adult who has a criminal history background check. At least one adult must supervise in each room where a minor performs such services. One adult walking the hallways is not sufficient.

## **LIVE CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS PREVENTION TRAINING**

The Diocese of Paterson utilizes the Virtus live training program entitled "Protecting God's Children". This is a National Program utilized by the majority of Dioceses throughout the United States. Further information on this program can be found at [www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org). This program enhances awareness and educates every adult to be a preventer/ protector. The program also emphasizes communication, reporting and the willingness to intervene. It is proactive, not punitive and has already resulted in improved child protection activities in our Diocese. All adults outlined in this policy must attend this initial live training program. Anyone attending Virtus "Protecting God's Children" training in another Diocese is **not required to attend another session**.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

The pastoral code of conduct "Living or Working with Integrity" or acceptable conduct policy must be read and acknowledged prior to working with children.

## **Safe Environment Training for Religious Education Programs**

### Policy Mandate

In 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* ("Charter"). Article 12 of the *Charter* provides as follows:

**Dioceses/eparchies will establish "Safe Environment" programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses/eparchies will make clear to clergy and to all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.**

This policy sets forth the procedures to be followed in the Diocese of Paterson with regard to implementing safe environment training programs for all students in all Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson Religious Education Programs.

### **Applicability of this Policy**

Safe environment training will be made available to all children in Parish Religious Education programs and similar catechetical programs.

### **Safe Environment Training:**

Training programs for children and young people will include age-appropriate material pertaining to personal safety. This includes information about improper touching and relationships. Children are not expected to be fully knowledgeable about child abuse or of the laws governing the care of children, but they need to know when they should seek assistance from a trusted adult.

The Diocese utilizes the Virtus "Teaching Touching Safety" program for children in the Parish Religious Education Programs. The material consists of lessons that are grade/age appropriate. The training will be presented by Directors/Coordinators of Religious Education and catechists.

Each parish will present one lesson as designated by the Office of Child & Youth Protection to two (2) grades in the Religious Education Program. The Diocesan Religious Education Programs will teach 1st and 4<sup>th</sup> graders each year.

### **Administration of the Safe Environment Training**

The Office of Child Protection, in consultation with the Director of Catechesis, will be responsible for choosing safety training programs/lessons for religious education students or making changes to any student safety programs.

The Diocesan Child Protection Office will record training information into the Child Protection Database for use with USCCB annual Child Protection Audits.

## **Safe Environment Training for Catholic School Students**

### **Policy Mandate**

In 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* ("Charter"). Article 12 of the *Charter* provides as follows:

**Dioceses/eparchies will establish "safe environment" programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses/eparchies will make clear to clergy and to all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.**

The job of ensuring children's safety is a challenging undertaking. The prevention of child sexual abuse requires more than adult awareness, education, and training about the nature and scope of the problem. We must also give our children the tools they need to overcome advances of someone who intends to harm them.

In accepting this responsibility, the parishes of the Diocese of Paterson provide for collaboration among parents, principals, and educators in our Catholic schools. The school principal and educators role is to assist and complete the work of the parents. Teaching Touching Safety is a program we are using in our Catholic school's curriculum that requires parents and other caring adults to help children learn appropriate relationship boundaries and how to protect themselves from violators. Through Teaching Touching Safety, we can empower children to respond in the best possible ways when those boundaries have been violated. Teaching Touching Safety is NOT a sex education program.

### **The Diocese's Teaching Touching Safety Program Synopsis:**

Children in grades K through 12 will be given 2 lessons each year of the Virtus Teaching Touching Safety Program. There are age-appropriate versions of every lesson for every grade. For example, Lesson One is entitled "Touching Safety Rules". Students will learn simple rules about what to do and how to react when someone's touch is confusing, scary, or makes the child or young person feel uncomfortable. Young people start to deal with the real risks they face when they are out in the world and on their own, and they begin to learn where to draw boundary lines in relationships. Children, young people, and their parents establish basic guidelines for working together to make certain which friends and other adults in their environment can be trusted to act safely and in the best interest of each child or young person.

## **OTHER PARISH/SCHOOL PROGRAMS POLICY**

In order to further enhance our safe environment program the following apply to other parish and school programs for children and youth:

- **Diocesan/Parish sponsored programs and activities with minors, such as Parish Religious Education classes, Confirmation Preparation classes, Search meetings, and Scout programs will not be held in private homes without written permission from the Bishop.**

The only exception to this rule is the parent who wishes to homeschool their own child/children in religious studies.

- **Antioch Retreats, Search and other overnight retreat type programs must be held at a well-supervised parish or retreat facility.**



All adults participating in these overnight functions must have criminal history background checks. Two or more supervisors, as needed, must be awake and vigilant at all times, during overnight hours.

- **If a family is hosting foreign students attending one of our Diocesan high schools, all members of that family or others (age 18 or older) who are living at the host family's house must submit to a criminal history background check and attend a "Protecting God's Children" session and acknowledge the Code of Conduct.**
- **Each parish must do a comprehensive "safety audit" of the rooms and areas used for Parish Religious Education Programs and parish life activities. Well-lit rooms and hallways should prevail. Access to secluded areas should be locked and off limits. A person designated to patrol the facility during class or activity enhances a safe environment program.**
- **Meetings with children must never be held behind closed doors unless there are at least 2 adults present or the view into the room through the door is unobstructed.**
- **Parishes and school and other Diocesan institution should always seek out best practices in the protection of children and to provide a safe environment.**

## **SAFE ENVIRONMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN OUR PROGRAMS**

In addition to our Pastoral Code of Conduct on the behavior of adults and those who aid in programs, we must also maintain a safe environment program for the children and teens in our programs. The following behavior code will support that safe environment.

"Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, thy whole mind, and thy whole soul. Thou shall love neighbor as thyself for the love of God."

We are called to honor and respect ourselves as part of the Body of Christ. We are also called to honor and respect one another as brothers and sisters in God's family. So it is that we will maintain the following regulations to ensure a safe environment for our religious education programs.

### **Rules for Children & Youth**

1. Use of the Internet, computer, video materials and handheld devices must fall strictly within the guidelines of the religious education program and Diocese Social Media Policy.

2. There will be zero tolerance for the disrespectful, violent, or abusive behavior of any type. Bullying, in particular, will not be tolerated.
3. There will be zero tolerance of harassment of any kind, including, but not limited to, verbal harassment, gender bias, threats, sexual harassment, and foul language.
4. There will be zero tolerance for substance abuse of any kind, including, but not limited to drugs, inhalants, alcohol, and tobacco.
5. No object which may be construed as a weapon or use of a said object as a weapon will be tolerated on-site at the parish, school or other diocesan sponsored programs.

The consequences for the foregoing behavior will be immediate. Parents may be called and required to remove their child. At the discretion of the Director of Religious Education or the Coordinator of Youth Ministry, the appropriate authorities and the Division of Youth and Family Services may be notified.

The Director/Coordinator of Religious Education or Youth Ministry will assess the incident. They may then decide that the child will not be re-admitted to the program until that child has been evaluated by an appropriate health care professional and a letter is provided to the Director stating that the child is not a danger to him/herself or others.

## **REQUIRED REPORTING OF SUSPECTED ABUSE**

**IF YOU SUSPECT A CHILD IS IN IMMINENT DANGER OF ABUSE,  
PLEASE CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY.**

We want to be certain that everyone who serves in Church ministry, or any entity affiliated with the Diocese of Paterson, is aware of the strict obligation to report promptly any sexual abuse of a minor.

To report sexual abuse perpetrated by anyone, including a member of the clergy or a church employee or volunteer or if you receive information from any source so as to give you reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, you must IMMEDIATELY:

1. Contact New Jersey Child Protection and Permanency, CP&P:

- CP&P Hotline: 1-877-652-2873, (CP&P was formerly the Division of Youth and Family Services, DYFS)

**State of New Jersey law requires that any person who suspects child abuse or neglect must report it immediately to the CP&P.**

2. Next, please contact your County Prosecutor:

- Morris County: (973) 285-6200
- Sussex County: (973) 383-1570

- Passaic County: (973) 881-4800

3. Finally, please report this to the Diocesan General Counsel

- Ken Mullaney - 973-777-8818, ext. 240 or email: [kmullaney@patersondiocese.org](mailto:kmullaney@patersondiocese.org)

“Immediately” in the above paragraphs means that it must be done without any delay whatsoever. This will allow you to follow the law and avoid the legal consequences of a delay in reporting. We have to go the extra mile to protect all children. The obligation to report abuse is not subject to the consent of the victim, parent, legal guardian, or person aware of the abuse.

If you wish a fuller explanation of the requirements and the legal obligations we have, go to this link on our Diocesan website for the Memorandum of Understanding between the County Prosecutors and the Dioceses of New Jersey: <https://rcdop.org/memorandum>

## **OUR COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

### **SCOPE & BACKGROUND**

The primary focus of this policy is on parish religious education programs, parish life activities, Catholic schools, any Diocesan programs serving children, and all Diocesan agencies that serve children or vulnerable adults.

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions apply:

- A “minor”, “child” or “youth” means any person under the age of 18 years.
- A vulnerable adult is someone aged 18 or over:
  - Who is, or may be, in need of community services due to age, illness or a mental or physical disability
  - Who is, or may be, unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation
- Affiliated institutions/organizations include: All Diocesan organizations including but not limited to Catholic Charities Organizations, Pathways Counseling, Assumption College for Sisters, Passaic Neighborhood Center for Women

Some examples of vulnerable adults are: People with mental health problems, individuals with physical, mental or developmental/intellectual disabilities, and people with acquired brain injury.

The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Article 13) requires each Diocese to create a safe environment program:

**ARTICLE 13.** Dioceses/eparchies will evaluate the background of all diocesan/eparchial and parish personnel who have regular contact with minors.

Specifically, they will utilize the resources of law enforcement and other community agencies. In addition, they will employ adequate screening and evaluative techniques in deciding the fitness of candidates for ordination (cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Program of Priestly Formation, 1993, no. 513)."

Our Safe Environment Program includes several components to assure the safety of our children and vulnerable adults as they worship study and participate in the various programs associated with our parishes, schools, and other institutions. These major components which are described in further detail in this document include but not limited to:

- Establishment of the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection
- Appointment of Local Youth Protection Coordinators at the Parish, Catholic school, and other Diocesan institutions level.
- Criminal history background checks.
- Child abuse awareness and prevention training.
- Social Media Policy
- Code of Conduct policy outlining appropriate conduct when working with children & youth.
- Ongoing changes and best practices in how certain youth programs are run to minimize the risks to our children.
- Safe environment training for designated Religious Education and Catholic School grade levels.
- Establishment of a Diocesan Review Board.

In addition to the steps described above, proactive steps to create a safe environment in our faith community are required by the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. These policies impact greatly on the way our parishes, schools, and agencies will function. Our overarching diocesan theme is "Prevention is the driving force of protection." We shall use every means to fulfill our mission.

The Diocese also provides a Victim Assistance Coordinator to assist people and families who are suffering in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Shame and fear have made it especially difficult for people to speak of the harm perpetrated on them when they were children. Anyone who reports abuse or comes to the Diocese for help and support will be treated with sensitivity, respect, and kindness. The Victims' Assistance Coordinator is responsible to provide support and offer therapeutic services to victims of clergy sex abuse. ***The Diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator, Ken McNiel, cell phone number: (973) 879-1489.***

Our Lord presents many challenges in the gospels which center around human beings caring for one another. Rather than look at the obstacles in the path, let us go forward working out the challenges together for the sake of our children and teens.

This policy shall be reviewed and amended as necessary so that our safe environment programs may reflect state of the art practice and technology.

“Whosoever of you causes stumbling blocks to be put in the path of one of these little ones; better that a great millstone was put around his neck and he is thrown into the sea...Suffer the little children to come unto me for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

- The Gospel of St. Mark 9:42; 10:15

Any questions concerning this policy should be directed to Eric Wilsusen at the Office of Child & Youth Protection. 973-777-8818 x257 or [ewilsusen@patersondiocese.org](mailto:ewilsusen@patersondiocese.org)