



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls

Safe Environment Policy

Introduction:

The following are policies and procedures of the safe environment program (SEP) of the Diocese of Sioux Falls (Diocese). The SEP governs the practices of priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, employees and lay volunteers. The SEP is set forth to fulfill the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and its Essential Norms as adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (“USCCB”). In addition to the Catholic schools and parishes of the Diocese, these policies also apply to all Catholic institutions which are subject to the governing authority of the Diocesan Bishop (collectively, “Catholic Institutions”).

Objective:

This policy is meant to establish and safeguard safe environments within Church ministries by preventing the opportunity for the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults and ensuring proper action is taken if and when signs of abuse are identified.

Definitions:

“**Abuse**” means inflicting or causing physical or mental injury, harm or imminent danger to the physical or mental health or welfare of a minor other than by accidental means. Abuse includes, but is not limited to, abandonment; excessive or unreasonable corporal punishment; malnutrition or substantial risk thereof, due to intentional or unintentional neglect; and the commission or allowing the commission of a sexual offense against a minor as defined by law. Child abuse also includes pornography in all its forms. Neglect includes the failure of a parent or custodian to provide adequate care, support for education, medication, or other care necessary for the minor’s well-being.

“**Adult**” For the purpose of these policies, “adults” include anyone who has turned 18 years old and is not a student in high school.

“**Church Personnel**” includes all employees and volunteers (clergy, religious, seminarians, deacon candidates, extern clergy and laity) of the Diocese of Sioux Falls, parishes, schools or other entities subject to the administrative authority of Bishop of Sioux Falls. (See definition of volunteer below.)

“**Essential 3**” means 1) acknowledgement of the Code(s) of Conduct (“Code”) 2) child protection training (“training”) and 3) a criminal background check (“screening”).

“**Local Safe Environment Coordinator**”

An individual who is designated by the Pastor, Catholic School System Administrator, Principal or Director of a Catholic institute under the authority of the Bishop to implement and maintain compliance of a parish, school or ministry with this Safe Environment Policy.

“**Minor**” is a person who has not yet lived passed the 18th anniversary of his or her birth.

“Victim Assistance Coordinator” is a person appointed by the Bishop to assist victims and their families when they report sexual misconduct or abuse by Church personnel. The Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC) will verify that the authorities have been properly notified, will inform victims and, if minors, their families, about counseling and pastoral assistance opportunities, and will keep the victim and, if a minor, his or her family, informed about the progress of any internal investigation.

“Volunteer” For the purposes of this policy, “volunteer” is defined as a person who acts in an unpaid but defined ministerial capacity for the Diocese of Sioux Falls, a parish, school or other Church institute. This category includes but is not limited to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the homebound, coaches, youth ministers, catechists and religious education teachers, retreat leaders, after-school activity coordinators, classroom assistants, parish ministry coordinators, food pantry workers, and tutors.

“Vulnerable Adult” is a person who has lived passed the 18th anniversary of their birth yet who is incapable of giving consent. “(A)ny person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, if even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence”.¹ Specific settings and/or circumstances can be essential factors leading to a vulnerability. For example, in ministry settings such as when seeking spiritual direction, marriage or grief counseling, and/or the sacrament of reconciliation, an individual’s vulnerability may become for pronounced; ; in employment settings, the authority of one position over another can lead to a vulnerability.

Implementation:

The Safe Environment Program of the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls (“Diocese”) is administered by the Safe Environment Coordinator under the direction of the Human Resources Director and the Chancellor. Pastors, School Principals, and the Directors of associated Catholic Institutions implement this policy at their respective locations.

An individual other than the person in this role by means of their office can be tasked with implementing this policy in the local parish, school or ministry. To task them with this work, the Pastor, Principal or Director of the Catholic Ministry must formally designate them using a *Local Coordinator Designation Form* (contact the Safe Environment Office for this form). The Local Coordinator assists in ensuing the implementation of this policy at the local level, monitoring members’ compliance, compiling and submitting the annual audits, and communicating with the Pastor, Principal or Director of the Catholic Ministry.

¹ *Vos Estis Lux Mundi, Motu Proprio* Promulgated by Pope Francis, May 7, 2019, Art. 1, §2,B.

Safe Environment Contacts

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Ms. Alison Conemac
Safe Environment Coordinator
(605) 988-3722
aconemac@sfcatholic.org

Communication of Reporting Information:

All reports of abuse are made to local law enforcement (or 911 if an emergency), child protection services (877)244-0864, or the state's attorney office in the county in which the victim resides or is present.

For abuse or related misconduct involving clergy, religious, or a layperson representing the Diocese, please do the following in addition to reporting to civil authorities:

- Report sexual abuse or related misconduct by a priest, deacon, religious, or layperson representing the Diocese, to the Victims Assistance Coordinator (800)700-7867, to the Chancellor at (605)988-3704, or the Safe Environment Office (605)988-3722.
- Report sexual abuse or related misconduct by a Catholic bishop to the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting (CBAR) Service online at ReportBishopAbuse.org or call (800)276-1562.
- To make a report about any bishop within the states of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota (Province of Saint Cloud and Minneapolis), including a deceased bishop, you may contact attorney Thomas L. Johnson, volunteer ombudsperson for the Archdiocese. Mr. Johnson may be reached directly at (612)632-3207 or via email at thomas.johnson@gpmlaw.com.

Adult Program:

Completing the "Essential 3", with the results of the background check found to be in compliance with our background check policy, will result in an individual being certified as compliant with our Safe Environment Policy. Those required to be in compliance with our SEP include:

1. All Clergy and religious residing in our Diocese and actively ministering.
2. All paid employees (full time, part-time and temporary).
3. All volunteers who, while fulfilling their ministerial responsibilities, have direct contact with minors in the absence of other adults that have been given supervisory responsibilities. Roles may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Religious education staff (teachers, interns, substitute teachers, discipleship group leaders, ministers, directors, and administrators)
 - b. Youth camp leaders, supervisors, hosts, guides (e.g. "Vacation Bible School")

- c. Group leaders and hosts for home-based programs or small group catechetical programs, such as youth discipleship
- d. Babysitters and caretakers during Mass and other parish/school-sponsored events or programs
- e. Chaperones to field trips, recreational outings, service outings, and/or pilgrimages (either one-day or overnight)
- f. Choir/music directors or instrumentalists who are providing instruction to minors
- g. Classroom helpers (includes parents and assistants)
- h. Coaches and team leaders
- i. College students who are assisting or observing in a classroom or library as part of their practicum for becoming a teacher
- j. Cooks and servers at the start of religious education classes
- k. Crossing guards
- l. Drivers for field trips or to recreational/learning outings. NOTE: These adults also need to complete the *Volunteer Driver Form*.
- m. Parents who attend most or all of their child's classes to assist/control their child or to observe
- n. Hall, playground, and/or lunchroom monitors
- o. Professionals hired by the parent to assist their child throughout the school day
4. All Volunteers who assist in a professional capacity.
5. All adults of non-diocesan groups using Diocesan facilities.

Those individuals who are **not** required to complete the SEP requirements, provided their ministry is limited to the specific conditions described below, include:

6. Adults volunteering at one-time (i.e. once per year) public events sponsored by the parish or school (e.g. fairs, carnivals, fundraising events, concessions stands during other events, athletic and fine arts events, parish meals) provided they have no responsibility for directly/solely supervising minors
7. Adults who are volunteering at a one-time event that is not sponsored by a parish or school, such as the "Knights of Columbus Free Throw Competition", provided they have no responsibility for directly/solely supervising minors
8. Parish Specific:
 - a. Adult liturgical ministers who serve at Holy Mass (lector, Eucharistic ministers, greeters, ushers, cantor, and choir members).
 - b. Participants serving on advisory committees (e.g. members of the parish's finance or pastoral councils, a building committee, stewardship committee, altar society).
 - c. Parents who participate in sacrament groups with their child as long as the group is directly supervised by an adult who has completed the safe environment program; for example a confirmation group.
 - d. Parents who want to attend up to two classes with their child OR are providing class treats as long as the group is directly supervised by an adult who has completed the safe environment program.
9. School Specific:
 - a. Adults who serve as volunteers or employees for a program contracted by the

- school that places adult professionals in classrooms. Examples include the Title 1 program teachers, Foster Grandparent Program, and Junior Achievement.
- b. Guest speakers (the Diocesan Outside Speaker Policy remains in effect).
 - c. Parents who want to attend up to two classes with their child OR are providing class treats as long as the group is directly supervised by an adult who has completed the safe environment program.

Certification:

The certification year, aligned to the performance audit period for the Charter, is July 1 through June 30. SEP requirements are completed through a Catholic Mutual Group Connect account (CMG Connect). Each adult is required to have a CMG Connect account to complete their certification requirement even if they attend a live event. This account is accessible to all parishes, schools, and agencies within the Diocese. The adult's account is managed by the Pastor, Principal or Director of the Catholic Ministry or their formally designated Local Coordinator for the parish, school, or Catholic Institution where the employee/volunteer is active. An adult's account may be associated with more than one location within the Diocese.

Individual clerics may, at times, be excused from certain continuing education requirements. These exemptions would typically be related to limited public ministry resulting from prolonged illness and/or infirmity brought on by the aging process. Exceptions for clergy must be approved by the Vicar General or Chancellor.

Priests and Deacons who fail to comply with the continuing education requirements may, after a warning, have their faculties rescinded or another penalty at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop.

The following “Essential 3” must be completed to be certified compliant with this policy each year:

1. Criminal Background Check (Screening)

Agree to a national background screening that evaluates any history related to criminal charges and agree to renew the background check every 6 years. Selection Management Systems, Inc. is used by the Diocese to screen employees, volunteers, priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and seminarians. Screenings to review criminal history and an update are performed every three months or more frequently if appropriate. (See Background Check Policy for further details.)

2. Annual Awareness Curriculum (Training)

This training provides education identifying the appropriate boundaries adults should have when working with minors and vulnerable adults, how to detect signs and symptoms of abuse, both in circumstances and events, and to be aware of what might indicate grooming behavior. An additional curriculum covering **Vulnerable Adults** is required of all who work with and/or minister to those in this category.

3. Code of Conduct (Professed Compliance)

Consent will be given to the **Code of Conduct for Adults Ministering to Minors and**

Vulnerable Adults. This Code of Conduct is provided each year and consent required within the Annual Awareness Curriculum. It will remain posted on the Diocesan Safe Environment Website page and provided to anyone who requests it. Those ministering to adults in vulnerable settings (i.e. one on one pastoral counseling, mentorship and/or spiritual direction, one-on-one healing ministry, extraordinary ministers to the homebound, etc.) will also be required to consent to the **Code of Conduct for Adults Ministering to Adults.**

Approved Training Curriculum:

Training curriculum for adults that has been reviewed and approved by the Bishop of Sioux Falls includes:

- 2016-2017 Annual Awareness Curriculum
- 2016-2017 Annual Awareness Curriculum – en Espanol
- 2017-2018 Annual Awareness Curriculum
- 2018-2019 Annual Awareness Curriculum
- 2018-2019 Limites – Entrenamiento en Ambiente Seguro (2019 Annual Awareness Curriculum)
- 2018-2019 Vulnerable Adult Live Event RSVP
- Vulnerable Adult Awareness Curriculum (Group Training)
- Vulnerable Adult eLearning
- 2019-2020 Awareness Curriculum for Parish Safe Environment
- 2019-2020 Awareness Curriculum for School Safe Environment
- 2019-2020 Awareness Curriculum
- 2020-2021 Annual Awareness Curriculum for Safe Environment
- Vulnerable Adult Awareness Curriculum

The online training curriculum that is in use for the audit period ending June 30, 2022.

- 2021-2022 Annual Awareness Curriculum for Safe Environment
 - Vulnerable Adult Awareness Curriculum

Training curriculum for youth participants that has been reviewed and approved by the Bishop of Sioux Falls includes:

- Circle of Grace (developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha)
- Made in His Image (developed in the Diocese of Steubenville in Ohio)
- Called to Protect (published by Praesidium, Inc.)

Any of these training resources can be used by parishes and Catholic institutions to satisfy the annual training requirements for youth.

Safe Environment Requirements for Extern/Visiting Clergy and Religious:

In addition to Safe Environment Program compliance, extern clergy and religious are required to have their superior complete and submit our Application for Ministerial Faculties Extern Cleric prior to their arrival in the Diocese.

More details can be found in the Diocesan policy for Visiting Clergy.

Safe Environment Requirements for Employees of Vendors Who Have Contact with Minors:

Vendors/service providing agencies must screen employees for any past criminal history as a condition of their work within a Church Institution. The responsibility for such screening rests with the vendor/service provider, not with the administrator of the Catholic Institution. The Church Institution's administrator is responsible for ensuring that the vendor/service providing agency has screened its employee and can attest to the employee's fitness for working in proximity with youth.

Vendors/service providers must provide a letter stating the date its employee was screened as well as a statement indicating the date and that the individual has nothing in his or her history that would prevent them from working with or near minors (attestation of their fitness for working with minors). Alternatively, vendors/service providers may supply a copy of their employee's criminal history report. If a vendor does not cooperate in this screening effort, another vendor shall be sought.

Safe Environment Compliance for Visiting Laity:

Lay Ministers and outside Speakers shall provide a letter attesting to their suitability for ministry in the context of minors. The letter must be written by either their pastor, chancery, or local Safe Environment Director on letterhead and shall include the signature of the appropriate authority. The letter, which must be received prior to the visit, shall contain the location of their ministry and the date(s) of the visit.

If they are not associated with a parish, the Diocese or other Church organization, references must be checked before the visit.

See also the Diocesan policy on Outside Speakers.

Safe Environment Compliance for Youth:

Persons aged 17 or younger who are enrolled in a Catholic school, parish religious education program or family formation group are required to complete a Bishop-approved, age-appropriate safe environment lesson, unless the child is opted-out by their parent/guardian. Persons who are 18 or 19 years of age *and* enrolled as a student at a Catholic school or religious education program may complete the minors program. However, if they are an employee or a volunteer with minors and/or vulnerable adults, they will complete the adult program.

Minors who are an employee or volunteer cannot be opted out of the safe environment program by their parents. Minor employees and volunteers cannot be in positions of authority, such as a supervisor or lead teacher; cannot be left alone to supervisor other minors (an adult must always be present), and cannot drive on behalf of a parish, school, or other Diocesan agency (drivers must be 21 years or older).

Only curriculum approved by the Bishop may be used for the safe environment curriculum.

Remote Learning and Evangelization:

As parishes integrate online platforms to provide faith formation (religious education, youth group, sacramental prep, CRCIA, Summer Vacation Bible School, etc.), safe environment training for minors remains a part of the formation the Catholic Church provides so that minors are equipped to thrive as healthy, happy, holy Catholics.

Youth and young people continue to experience an expansion of learning conducted through online software and online live interactions with teachers, coaches, and religious education staff. All religious education that will have in-person or live online interaction with staff or non-live direct interaction with staff (phone call, or periodic interaction with their religious education instructor) will need to complete the minor's safe environment training.

If a parish, school or ministry conducts religious education instruction without any interaction with the minor (only providing materials to the parent/guardian) the Safe Environment minor's curriculum will be provided to the parent to present at home.

Youth Employees or Volunteers

Minors who are employees or volunteers are required to complete the *Youth Assistant Training*. The local coordinator or hiring authority presents the training to the minor. If the minor turns 18 before December 1, they will complete the adult safe environment program in CMG Connect and not be included in the minor audit.

A Youth Assistant is responsible for assisting the adult minister with classroom or event activities, such as making or collecting copies, handing out/collecting worksheets, crayons, pens, pencils, and etc. Youth Assistants DO NOT supervise other youth/peers, teach, administer medication, or drive for an event. An adult who has completed the safe environment program should always be present and is responsible for providing supervision and teaching.

Requirements before a youth is employed or volunteering:

- Be at least 14 years old.
- Have an interest in volunteering and/or working with the parish and other Youth.
- Actively participate in prayer and worship.
- Have demonstrated the ability to follow instructions.
- Be positive, enthusiastic, and show leadership skills.
- Must have parental permission and support.
- Must complete the *Youth Assist Lesson*, which includes the *Youth Code of Conduct*. This training addresses boundaries relevant to the role of a Youth Assistant. Youth Assistants cannot be opted-out of the lesson by their parents.

Monitoring Safe Environment Compliance

Minors Audits are required from each parish, school or ministry annually. The audit forms are provided to the Pastor, Principal or Executive Director (or their Local Coordinator) annually. This audit demonstrates compliance with this policy.

Adult Audits are required from each parish, school or ministry annually. The audit forms are provided to the Pastor, Principal or Executive Director (or their Local Coordinator) annually.

This audit demonstrates compliance with this policy.

The Safe Environment Coordinator may request an in-person onsite audit to offer support and to verify the audit(s) submitted.

The Office of Child and Youth Protection as well as independent auditors hired by the USCCB may audit parishes and the Diocese respectively on a regular basis to ensure that all requirements of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People have been met.