

Children's Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Handbook for PARENTS

REVISED FOR 2020-2021



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NOTICE: St. Matthew Catholic Church intends the information presented in this handbook to be as accurate and complete as possible at the time of publication. We welcome reporting errors and unintended omissions or misinformation to the Faith Formation office. Changes occurring after publication will be reflected in future editions, and we will make all reasonable efforts to keep you informed.

From Our Pastor

Dear Parents,

Welcome to our Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Program. I commend you for your commitment to faith formation for your children/teens and family. We hope and pray that during this year we may grow together in love and discipleship for our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we come together as a community of faith to be nourished by the Word and Eucharist, we can go forth and bring the presence of Christ to the world. And this is what we should want for our children/teens.

As parents, you've probably already discovered that setting an example is the best way to teach children/teens about the Catholic faith. For children/teens, actions are often far more important than words. They learn more from what you do than what you say. Your participation in weekly Mass, receiving the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, and the giving of your time, talent, and treasure, all these teach your children/teens about their faith better than religion classes.

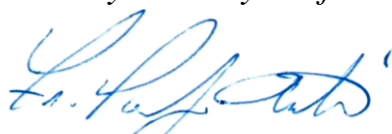
Faith Formation at St. Matthew's can succeed only with the active participation of parish families like yours. This means families should continue the process of learning and practicing their faith on their own every day between weekend Faith Formation sessions. Praying together often, blessing meals, asking for God's help, etc., all these are important ways you can do this.

Also, please take the opportunity to get to know your children/teens' catechists. Offer your support and assistance. There are many ways you can be involved. You can teach or assist, or you can help in the office or be a chaperone, donate supplies, or even help with childcare.

We realize many people have limited time available, but we have needs that do not require heavy commitments. Please give Marissa Miranda or Lisa Limberger a call.

With everyone's participation, we can ensure that your children/teens benefit from all the talents and gifts with which God has blessed you and our Church.

God bless you and your family always,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fr. Tom Anastasia".

Fr. Tom Anastasia Pastor

“Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them;
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Mt 19: 14)

Welcome!

Dear Parents,

Welcome and thank you for choosing the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry program here at St. Matthew Catholic Church to guide and support your family's growth in the Catholic faith. Our team eagerly looks forward to serving you this year.

This Handbook will provide you with valuable information about the coming year. It is important that you read it thoroughly and, as a family, discuss all the information in it.

On the last page of this Handbook you'll find an acknowledgement form saying you've received it and you agree to abide by the policies and procedures of St. Matthew's and the Diocese of St. Petersburg. Please tear off this page, fill it out, sign it, and return it to the Faith Formation office.

As parents, you have the greatest influence on your children/teens' faith. Their progress will be determined significantly by how much interest you show in their work. So each week, please take the time to look through their classwork, including lessons and take home papers. Talk about it with them. Let your love for them show, as you celebrate their accomplishments and creativity. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us.

Students please, always show your parents whatever you did in class. Let them be proud of you!

Parents, children, and teens, please attend any-and-all whole family gatherings during the year.

Finally, our priests, staff, and catechists are here for you. We thank you for the privilege of serving your family. We're sure it will be a richly blessed year!

Christ's love & blessings to you all,

~ The Children's Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Team

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Mission: To Serve You and Your Family!	4
Faith Formation Programs	4
Sacraments: First Reconciliation & First Communion	5
Session Schedules & Calendar	6
Policies & Procedures	7
Enrollment	7
Attendance	8
Conduct	9
Appropriate Dress and Appearance	10
Cancellations (e.g., Weather Emergencies, etc.)	10
Safe Environment – Your Child’s Safety	11
Harassment Policy	11
Privacy – Confidentiality	12
Family Information	13
Faith Formation Information	13
Volunteers Always Needed	13
APPENDIX: Policy for the Protection of Children	14

Our Mission: To Serve You and Your Family!

During his ministry on earth, Jesus taught his disciples; he led them and inspired them. When they began praying together and preaching, their hearts burned with love for their faith. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ said to those who became his apostles, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...” (Mt 28:19a)

For our families, **the mission of Faith Formation** at St. Matthew Catholic Church is ...

- ✠ to instill in students and their families an interest and appreciation for our Catholic faith and to provide understanding,
- ✠ to develop their spiritual lives and their moral character and enable them to participate fully in the Church through the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Our mission also includes providing parents with opportunities for enrichment in their faith, so that their whole families can live their lives fully “in Christ” as his disciples.

Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Programs

For elementary school aged children (K– 5)

At St. Matthew Catholic Church, we offer two methods of receiving faith formation:

- Classroom sessions that follow a curriculum covering specific topics in a sequence of age appropriate presentations, activities, or experiences. These sessions are intended to be stimulating and enjoyable in order to maximize the children’s interest and involvement, and therefore also to maximize learning (i.e., more like day camp than school).
- Family Program ... a “home-based” program for families who are very active in the church and will commit substantial time and effort in providing for their children religious education and spiritual formation. Families in this program meet periodically together with the Coordinator of Religious Education (C.R.E.) for guidance and sharing.

For middle school and high school aged Grade 6 – Grade 12

St. Matthew Catholic Church offers an experience that blends Catholic teaching with youth ministry. Learning and growth in the faith is provided through formal sessions and group activities and outings.

Sacraments: First Reconciliation, Communion, and Confirmation

Preparation for First Sacraments – Reconciliation & Communion is separate from the Children’s Faith Formation (K-5) programs:

- ✦ To be eligible, a child must be age 7 or older (as of September 1st) and baptized in the Catholic Church (i.e., by a Catholic priest in accord with the Rite of Baptism).* ALSO, the Diocese of St. Petersburg requires that the child must have received at least one year of religious education and be enrolled and attending a catechetical program along with the “First Sacraments” program.

Note: Kindergarten classes are considered pre-catechetical; they do not count as a year of preparation for sacraments. Proof of baptism is required. Acceptable forms of proof include verifying St. Matthew church records *OR* 1 baptismal certificate from the church at which baptism occurred.

Preparation for Confirmation is separate from the Youth Ministry program:

- ✦ To be eligible, a teen must be baptized in the Catholic Church (i.e., by a Catholic priest in accord with the Rite of Baptism). ALSO, the Diocese of St. Petersburg requires that the teen must be in the second consecutive year of a catechetical program for youth. Furthermore, at St. Matthew Catholic Church, preparation for and receiving the sacrament of Confirmation takes place during a teen’s sophomore (grade 10) year.

The programs for preparing for a sacrament involve one or more workshops/retreats. **For each sacrament (Reconciliation, Communion, and Confirmation), parents are expected to participate in at least one of the workshops/retreats.**

Note: No student who is a minor may receive a sacrament unless parents give consent. In the case of divorce or separation, the legally custodial parent must consent. In the case of joint custody, both parents must give consent. Otherwise, St. Matthew Catholic Church will consult the Tribunal for the Diocese of St. Petersburg for case-by-case disposition.

Teens or children age 7 or older as of September 1st who are not yet baptized, or who are baptized in a different Christian tradition (i.e., non-Catholic), would receive their sacraments through the program known as **R.C.I.A. -Adapted For Children.**

Session Schedules & Calendar

A calendar for the year is available separately from this Handbook. Printed copies are available online, from your child's catechist, or from the office upon request.

Classes and home sessions meet as follows; subject to change as needed.

- **Elementary Grades K-5** Sundays 9:30am – 10:45am
(weekly, except according to calendar)
- **Middle & High School** Sundays 9:15am – 10:45am
(weekly, except according to calendar)
- **Family Program** Home sessions are at families' discretion, with monthly meetings with Coordinator of Religious Education
- **“R.C.I.A. – Adapted for Children”** Sundays after 11am Mass, coordinated with adult R.C.I.A.

Masses: As with all the Catholic faithful, children and teens are expected attend and celebrate Mass every weekend and on Holy Days of Obligation. Our schedule of Masses is published on the cover of the weekly bulletin and at the church website www.stmat.org. It is also available, along with the weekly readings at the *MyParish* app for St. Matthew Catholic Church.

When traveling, Mass schedules can be found by dialing 1-734-794-2100; also at www.masstimes.org.

Penance Services: In addition to receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, all children through Grade 8 who are eligible to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation are expected attend the St. Matthew Penance Services for Advent and Lent with their families. Parents should support their children and set an example of commitment to the sacraments of the Church by attending these Penance Services and participating along with them. (Note: The parish Penance Services may not be age appropriate)

Policies & Procedures

Enrollment

- 1) Families who wish to enroll children in Faith Formation & Youth Ministry programs are not required to be registered as member-parishioners, but it is highly recommended. If you are not yet a member, just ask and we'll help you join.
- 2) To enroll in the Faith Formation program, students must be eligible for Kindergarten in the Pinellas County School system (i.e., 5 years old or older as of September 1st in the year for which the student is enrolling).
- 3) Prior to attending any program or classes, registration in Faith Formation & Youth Ministry is required by completing a registration form. Depending on space available and volunteers, students will be placed in classes. Otherwise, alternative programs can be arranged (e.g., the home program). Parents must then pay applicable fees before the students can attend classes. Note: All eligible children are welcome regardless of financial situation. Payment terms and scholarships are available. Registration forms are available online and at the church office.

IMPORTANT: For minors, the registration form must be signed by the legal custodial parent or guardian. Also, health or medical issues that St. Matthew Catholic Church needs to accommodate must be noted on the registration form (e.g., allergies, disabilities, etc.). And finally, any legal circumstances that must be honored by St. Matthew Catholic Church must be documented with official copies of applicable court orders; without this documentation on file, St. Matthew Catholic Church does not accept responsibility for situations that breach such orders.

- 4) Admission into the home-based alternative program requires approval from the Director of Evangelization & Lifelong Faith Formation (E.L.F.F.) or Pastor.
- 5) Prior to attending the First Sacraments program, proof of baptism is required for students who are new to the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry program. Since baptism is the sacrament by which an individual becomes a member of the Church, students who are not yet baptized must receive this sacrament before receiving any other of the Church's sacraments.
- 6) If a student is eligible for a sacrament, the student's family will be contacted to arrange enrollment in the Sacrament Preparation program.

The preparation workshop for First Reconciliation will be scheduled in the fall, and the student's first Sacrament of Reconciliation should be received soon after the workshop.

Preparation for First Eucharist will be scheduled before Easter, and the student's first Sacrament of Eucharist will be scheduled for a weekend Mass sometime after Easter.

- 7) As explained above, to be eligible for First Sacraments a child must be age 7 or older (as of September 1st) and baptized in the Catholic Church. Also, the child must have previously received at least one year of religious education and be currently enrolled and attending a catechetical program. A separate registration form is also required.
- 8) If a student should attend the "R.C.I.A. – Adapted for Children" program (i.e., is of age 7 years or older and needs to be baptized, or was baptized non-Catholic Christian), the student's family will be contacted to arrange enrollment. However, no additional registration is required. "R.C.I.A. – Adapted for Children" will be scheduled to follow the calendar of the adult program for R.C.I.A, beginning in the Fall and continuing as needed throughout the year.

Attendance

- 1) For your child's success in Faith Formation & Youth Ministry, your involvement is essential. The Declaration on Christian Education (Vatican II) says, "... Parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children ..." This obligates parents to strive to live a life in Christ and be active in the Church not only for themselves but to set an example for their children as well. **Be sure to attend Mass regularly with your children !**
- 2) Parents should also frequently review their child's progress and discuss it with them. Also parents are expected to attend all important meetings and events that pertain to their children's participation in the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry program.
- 3) Parents are responsible for their children before and after Faith Formation & Youth Ministry class sessions **IMPORTANT**: Students should always be in the company of a responsible adult and never left unsupervised. **Students should be brought to class by a parent a few minutes before class time and should be picked up promptly after class.** If a catechist is not in the classroom, parents should remain with their children until the catechist (or appropriate adult authority, e.g., the Director) is present to assume responsibility.
- 4) Regular student attendance at class sessions or special events or activities is expected. Important topics and subject matter may span several classes, and absences may leave gaps in a student's understanding, hampering his/her ability to participate in subsequent sessions. It is also respectful of catechists who volunteer their time and students who depend on each other for active participation. For certain topics, especially for sacrament preparation, students may be expected to make up missed material due to absences.

Note: Attending Faith Formation & Youth Ministry classes is *never* a substitute for Mass.
- 5) For the benefit of parents, attendance records are kept for all sessions. If a student is absent, parents may be notified by phone unless the parents contact the office in advance. This helps assure that parents, "know where their children are ..."
- 6) Tardiness is a distraction to both students and catechists and robs students of valuable instruction time. A consistent pattern of tardiness without explanation or excuse will be regarded as a lack of commitment to the program, and parents will be consulted to determine whether the student should continue in the program.
- 7) If a child needs to be excused from a class session early, the legally custodial parent or guardian must provide a written and signed note prior to the beginning of class session time, and only the legally designated adult— or his/her designee, by written authorization – in accordance with the note, will be allowed to take the child from the building.
- 8) No calls other than for emergencies will be taken during class session times. For most circumstances, please call during normal business hours, Monday –Thursday 9:00am to 4:00pm and Friday 9:00am to 12:00noon.

Conduct

We pledge to provide a safe, wholesome, and enriching Christian environment for your child(ren). This requires the support and cooperation of everyone involved in Faith Formation & Youth Ministry: parents, catechetical team members and students. Appropriate behavior is expected at all times!

- 1) Disrupting a session (including interruptions, toys or games, etc.)*, violence or intimidation of others, inappropriate attire or behavior, inappropriate language, insolence or disrespect will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action. [*Cell phones must be “off.”]
- 2) Parish and personal property must be respected at all times. Misuse, vandalism, theft, or any other abuse of property will result in immediate disciplinary action.
- 3) Drugs (other than for legitimate medical purposes), alcoholic beverages, tobacco products or weapons of any kind are never permitted. Possession of any of these items can result in immediate dismissal from class sessions and possible withdrawal from the program. Parents will be contacted and consulted, along with appropriate church agencies and possibly law enforcement, as necessary.

Minor violations of this code of conduct may be handled with any or all of the following:

- ☞ Parental notification of incidence(s)
- ☞ Meeting between parents, catechist, and the Coordinator of Religious Education and/or Youth Minister
- ☞ Parent required to accompany student at class sessions
- ☞ Temporary withdrawal of student from the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry program
- ☞ Permanent withdrawal of student from the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry program

Serious violations requiring intervention by church or legal authorities will be dealt with immediately.

The Coordinator of Religious Education and Youth Minister ensure that all students are treated in a fair and consistent manner. **Parents should contact the Coordinator of Religious Education or Youth Minister *immediately* whenever there is an issue or concern with action toward their child(ren) by a catechetical team member, staff, or other students.** Parents also may contact the Pastoral Ministry Coordinator or the Pastor for further recourse.

Appropriate Dress and Appearance

The following guidelines are based on the Pinellas County School System and have been adopted by St. Matthew Catholic Church for Faith Formation and Youth Ministry:

- ✓ Students shall keep their clothes, bodies and hair clean.
- ✓ Students shall wear footwear held securely on the feet for protection and safety.
- ✓ Students shall not wear hats or head coverings inside classrooms unless previously approved for medical reasons or for special circumstances, as approved by catechists.
- ✓ Students shall not wear decorations, symbols, mottoes or designs on the body or clothing showing unacceptable products (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, drugs), inappropriate clubs or groups (e.g., gangs), or inappropriate pictures or words (e.g., profanity).
- ✓ Students shall not wear spandex and/or beach-type clothing to classes.
- ✓ Students shall not wear unnecessarily revealing garments, e.g., very short shorts or miniskirts, see-through clothing, or halter tops or tops that leave the stomach showing.
- ✓ Students clothing shall be worn appropriately as designed. For example, pants are to be worn securely at the waist.
- ✓ Jewelry shall be worn in a way that does not present a safety or health hazard or cause a major distraction to the educational process. Wallet chains are not permitted.
- ✓ The Coordinator of Religious Education will make the decision if a student's appearance meets the above standards. The Coordinator may consult with parents, but the Coordinator's decision on the appropriateness of the dress is final.
- ✓ A student in violation of the dress code will be required to change into appropriate clothing before returning to class. If necessary, the student will contact parents to provide the appropriate clothing.
- ✓

Cancellations (e.g., Weather Emergencies, etc.)

Should a tropical storm or hurricane be forecast to hit our area, it may be necessary for classes to be canceled. City Emergency Management officials have advised us that the decision to close our program should be tied to a public agency, such as Pinellas County Schools. Because the county can more efficiently inform the public of program cancellations, due to inclement weather, we will cancel Faith Formation & Youth Ministry when public schools in Pinellas County close for a tropical storm or hurricane. The decision to cancel classes will be based on the Pinellas County School system's decision to cancel public school classes the Friday prior to Faith Formation & Youth Ministry for Sunday classes, or for any scheduled Faith Formation & Youth Ministry weekday sessions, the weekday before.

If you wish to confirm that classes have been canceled, call the Parish office at 393-1288. Because the decision to cancel may be made several days prior to Faith Formation classes, it is important to remember that the decision to cancel will stand firm, regardless of how the weather may improve for that day. It is better to be cautious and incorrect than to be uncertain and have confusion.

Safe Environment – Your Child’s Safety

(See “SUMMARY OF DIOCESAN POLICY,” included in the APPENDIX of handbook)

All clergy, staff, and volunteers at St. Matthew Catholic Church comply with all diocesan guidelines for providing a safe environment for our children, youths, and elderly adults. Thorough background checks are performed, and “Safe Environment” training for our catechetical team, parents, and youth is provided.

Harassment Policy

The Diocese of St. Petersburg and St. Matthew strive for an educational environment that is Christian, professional, and supportive for all persons engaged in or involved with Faith Formation & Youth Ministry programs. No parish will be responsible for harassment off premises unless it occurs at a parish or Faith Formation & Youth Ministry sponsored event.

The purpose of this policy is ...

- that each individual is free from physical, psychological or verbal intimidation and harassment (e.g., bullying, etc.) in the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry settings (e.g., bullying);
- that each individual involved in Faith Formation & Youth Ministry programs maintain and further develop attitudes and behaviors which express respect for others and reflective of each person's (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 and other liturgies, worship services and ministries.

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:

1. Physical, mental or verbal abuse
2. Insults, jokes or derogatory slurs based on race, gender, age, disability, or any other protected group or status, as well as individual personally, features, or characteristics
3. Unwelcome sexual advances or touching
4. Implicit or explicit requests for sexual favors
5. Unwanted sexual comments (serious or humorous)
6. Unwanted sexually suggestive telephone calls, letters, e-mails, etc.
7. Comments or jokes based on issues of modesty and developing social awareness
8. Unwanted forced involvement in activities (e.g., physical, religious etc.)
9. Coercion of religious styles or personal beliefs upon a participant.
10. Intimidation in front of a group or forced personal sharing in groups
11. 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.

Privacy - Confidentiality

St. Matthew Catholic Church abides by the Privacy Act and will not disclose personal, confidential information to third parties without the written permission of the individual(s) involved. However, your child(ren)'s catechists will be given access to certain information (name, address, telephone, parent's name, etc...) that they need to carry out their responsibilities in the classroom.

IMPORTANT: Regarding the rights of non-custodial parents, we will abide by the Buckley Amendment. Unless there is 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, it is the responsibility of the parent to provide the St. Matthew Catholic Church with an official copy of the court order.

Photographs will not be taken or displayed of a student unless permission has been granted on our registration form or the acknowledgement form attached to this Handbook.

Family Information

NOTE: There is space on the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry registration form to provide us with the following information ...

Allergies: It is imperative that you make us aware of any food allergies your child might have as snack will be served. Please provide in writing, any allergies your child might have. If your child has food allergies, please provide your own snack so that we can ensure that your child's health will not be compromised.

Other Health Problems: If your child has any unusual health problems such as bleeding (e.g., nose bleeds), seizures, allergies, hearing/vision difficulties, etc., please let the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry office know in writing. (There is space on the registration form for this.) If we are aware of these problems, we will do our best to handle situations of this nature when they arise. Should any health problems arise during the school year, please notify the office immediately.

Please do not send your child(ren) to class if they are not feeling well. If your child comes to class while ill, you will be contacted and asked to come and take the child home.

Special Needs: Please notify us of any special learning needs of your child so that we may better serve your child in the classroom. All information will be kept confidential and shared only with those who need to accommodate your child's needs.

Information Changes: Please inform the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry office of any changes in your address, home phone number, cell or work phone numbers, or if there is a change in Emergency Contact. It is **very important** that all information be kept current in the office.

Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Information

Normally we will distribute information by email. Occasional announcements may appear in the church bulletin, and at times in notices sent home via your children or by US mail. Therefore, it is important that we have your correct email address. Nonetheless, it is the responsibility of you, the parent, to remain informed.

Please check to see if your child has brought anything home with him or her and watch for bulletin notices. When in doubt, feel free to contact the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry office for information. Note: Information that sent home with students that applies to more than one student (e.g., for the whole family) will be sent home with the oldest child.

In the case of a student being absent from class, please check with the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Office regarding any pertinent information that may have been sent home with students that class.

Volunteers Always Needed

Our Faith Formation & Youth Ministry program at St. Matthew's offers instruction for kindergarten through tenth grade students. Please consider volunteering in the classroom as a member of our team. On-going training through a diocesan certification program, as well as personal support are available to you as a member of our volunteer staff. Substitutes for are always much needed.

One Final Note ...

We're here for you. *Please* let us know if there's anything we can do to make our program more effective for your children and your family.



Diocese of St. Petersburg
Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults
(Revised and Approved July 2017)

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 have 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 <http://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

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[i]. 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 (1-800-9622873). 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 <http://www.dosp.org/safe-environment/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/Practical-Standards-of-ProfessionalResponsibility-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

<http://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.

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

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



DIOCESE
OF ST. PETERSBURG
Pastoral Center

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