

**Diocese of Lafayette  
DIOCESAN POLICIES**

*Safe Environment*

**INTRODUCTION:** The Church celebrates and promotes the value, worth, dignity and life of every child and seeks to foster a safe environment for all children, especially those entrusted to Her care. The abuse of minors is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. All clergy and those in clerical formation, religious and those in consecrated life, employees and volunteers who supervise or work with children (*hereafter referred to as eligible adults*) are subjects of this policy.

**IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY:**

*Mandated:*

**A. Programs and Procedures**

1. The Office of Safe Environment of the Diocese of Lafayette has programs and procedures to insure a safe environment for all children.
2. A Victim Assistance Coordinator, designated by the Bishop, shall respond promptly to any allegation where there is reason to believe that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred by any cleric.
3. The Diocese of Lafayette has a Code of Conduct for eligible adults.
4. The Diocese of Lafayette has a program of screening and evaluation techniques to determine the fitness of candidates for ordination.
5. Letters of suitability and testimonial letters must be provided by bishops and superiors of those clerics who wish to practice temporary ministry in the Diocese of Lafayette. It is the responsibility of the pastor to provide copies of letters for priests to the Chancellor of the Diocese and letters for Deacons and Religious Brothers and Sisters to the Office of the Permanent Diaconate.
6. Any eligible adult who has actual knowledge of, or who has reasonable cause to suspect that an incident of child abuse has occurred (unless to do so would violate the priest/penitent relationship of the Sacrament of Reconciliation), must follow all applicable civil laws for reporting such instances and then shall immediately report to the diocesan authorities.
7. The Diocese of Lafayette shall follow all applicable Louisiana civil laws for reporting to public authorities when allegations and/or suspicions of sexual abuse of a person who is a minor are made against any eligible adult.
8. A diocesan review board shall function as the Bishop's confidential consultative body in matters of sexual abuse of a minor.

9. Diocesan policy provides that for even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor, the offending cleric or person in formation will be permanently removed from ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state, if the case so warrants.

## **B. Parish and Catholic School Requirements**

1. Pastors/Principals/Administrators are responsible for ensuring that all eligible adults under their authority are given a copy of this policy.
2. All Eligible Adults shall:
  - a. Undergo required background screening, including a criminal history check (fingerprint check for catholic school employees) and reference checks.
  - b. Participate in an initial safe environment education session prior to working with minors. Each year thereafter, those adults shall be required to participate in a continuing education session. If an individual has five continuous years of no continuing education, he/she will be required to recertify through initial training.
3. All diocesan-sponsored educational programs (catholic schools and parish programs) are required to provide age-appropriate safe environment education for all students annually.
4. All diocesan-sponsored education programs (catholic schools and parish programs) are required to offer safe environment education sessions for parents annually.
5. All parishes and schools of the Diocese of Lafayette shall have a Safe Environment Coordinator, however it is ultimately the Pastor/School Chancellor's responsibility to ensure that the diocesan safe environment program is implemented and adhered to.

## **C. Charter Requirements**

1. The Diocese of Lafayette cooperates to the fullest extent with the National Office of Child and Youth Protection.
2. The Diocese of Lafayette fully cooperates and is in compliance with the U.S. Bishops' policies regarding the transfer of any priest or deacon and cooperation with religious communities.
3. The Diocese of Lafayette shall not enter into any confidentiality agreements in cases of sexual abuse where the victim is a minor, except for grave and substantial reasons brought forward by the victim or the parent or guardian of a victim who is still a minor, and which reasons shall be clearly noted in the text of the agreement.

**D. Enforcement**

Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the Safe Environment Policy will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination or removal from position. The Diocese of Lafayette reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time, at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events.

APPROVED: + Michael J. Gerrell

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