

Diocesan Policies for Coordinators of Youth Ministry and Adult Volunteers Serving in Ministry With Youth

All volunteers serving in ministry with youth should:

- 1) Complete the Screening Form for Volunteers Working with Minors (Section 9)
- 2) Review the Standards of Conduct (Section 7)

These documents are kept on file in the parish office.

It is the responsibility of the Pastor or Pastoral Administrator or his/her designated representative to review the Screening Form for Volunteers Working with Minors and conduct any confirmation of references deemed appropriate. Volunteer and personal references should always be checked when a person applying to volunteer has:

- 1) Not been a member of the parish for at least three years.
- 2) Indicated a lapse in service in other volunteer settings.

It is recommended that all volunteers in ministry with youth should receive a copy of the:

- 1) Standards of Conduct
- 2) Job Description (see sample)
- 3) Other diocesan policies and forms as deemed appropriate by the Pastor and/or Coordinator of Youth Ministry.

Standards of Conduct

Introduction

This document is intended as an instrument to help adult leaders to identify their personal and ministerial standards of conduct while participating in events with youth. It is recommended that the Pastor or Pastoral Administrator, parish Coordinator of Youth Ministry, or the Pastor's or Pastoral Administrator's delegate review these standards with all adults working with youth.

I. General Principles

A) Integrity

Youth Ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth must be persons of integrity and conduct themselves in an honest and open manner, free from deception or corruption.

B) Competence

Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth must maintain high levels of professional competence in their particular ministry. Training, education, and experience all contribute to making them competent and credible in their areas of expertise and service.

C) Respect for Other's Rights and Dignity

Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth must respect the rights, dignity, and worth of each member of the Church community without regard to their economic status or degree of participation in parish life. Youth Ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth should be sensitive to cultural differences among people and appreciate the opportunities that diversity brings. Youth ministers and volunteers do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental abilities, or language.

Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth are committed to providing a safe environment for youth and adults, free from any and all harassment and intimidation. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical and verbal behavior which can include, but is not limited to: physical or mental abuse, racial insults, derogatory ethnic slurs, sexual advances or unwelcome touching, sexual comments or sexual jokes, requests for sexual favors used a condition of employment or affecting personnel decisions, or participation, display of obscene materials.

D) Conversations, Meetings, and Travel with Youth

Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth must not disclose information revealed in conversations. Confidentiality is an important value. Exceptions, cases wherein confidentiality cannot be maintained, would include, but are not limited to: threat of suicide, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, drug or alcohol use, or other situations wherein human life and safety are at risk. In recognition of the preceding examples, youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth may promise confidentiality only within, and in light of, the above limitations.

Obviously, those who minister to young people have an obligation to act with personal integrity in all their dealings, but it is also important to avoid even the impression of impropriety. For their own protection, and to help maintain a comfortable environment for the youth with whom they serve, ministers should always be aware of the impressions they create. Certain professional habits can help protect the integrity of one's ministry:

- 1) Do not spend an unusual amount of time with any individual young person. Too much time spent with one person may give an unhealthy impression either to that young person or to others who become aware of the imbalance of attention.

2) Avoid placing yourself in situations in which your actions are not witnessed. It is our policy to have more than one adult present during, and especially after, youth activities. For example, if you need to drive a young person home at night, have another adult go with you, or perhaps several other young people. If this is not possible, ask the young person's parents to come after him or her.

3) Certainly there may be times when privacy is necessary, such as when a young person seeks your opinion on a sensitive matter. Youth ministry volunteers do not provide counseling, still, any conversation is still a function of our parish ministry and should be done in a professional manner. It is our policy to have clear parameters in any such situation:

- a) Use a space which provides privacy but is always visible to other team members. Meetings should not be done in private living quarters or at places or times that would cause ambiguity in the mind of the youth.
- b) Arrange the meeting space so that you and the young person are a comfortable distance apart.
- c) Let another person (ideally, the Coordinator) know when you are about to begin and when you have ended a private conversation. This person should see the young person leave.
- d) Establish a beginning and ending time for the meeting. If it is necessary to go beyond the set time, inform another person of the change in schedule.
- e) Immediately following a meeting, make notes which include the time and date of the meeting and appropriate comments.
- f) Adult leaders are discouraged from meeting with youth apart from parish events and are not to meet young people in non-public situations. If you feel the young person has developed an unhealthy attraction to you, or vice versa, it would be best to refer him or her to another adult.
- g) Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth must not step beyond their competence in dealing with personal issues in the lives of youth. If you think the issues being raised go beyond the scope of your knowledge, comfortableness, or the time restraints provided, you should speak to the parish priest or youth ministry coordinator. If counseling is indicated, the parish priest or coordinator should be the contact person for such a referral.
- h) Physical contact with youth beyond a handshake can often be misconstrued by both youth and adults and should only occur under appropriate public circumstances (e.g.: Sign of Peace at Liturgy).

4) Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth should not go on vacations or overnights alone with minors other than their own children. They should never share beds with minors nor should adults share sleeping quarters with minors unless one of the youth is their own child. On the rare occasion when dormitory accommodations are present, the dorm should be exclusively youth and if adults must be present, no less than two adults accompany the youth in the dorm.

5) Young people are at a stage of continuous emotional development and upheaval and can easily become infatuated with caring adults. These attractions are a normal part of growing up and are not usually a cause for concern, but they become problematic if they go too far. A sensitive minister will always be aware of the possibility of infatuation and, when it occurs, act so as not to encourage it while, at the same time, giving the young person support in a time of great vulnerability.

II. Self Care

Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth should be sensitive to warning signs in their behavior and moods which indicate conditions that can be detrimental to their mental, physical, and spiritual health. Inappropriate use of alcohol or misuse of prescription drugs are examples. Adult leaders should immediately seek help when they identify such warning signs in their personal lives.

Youth ministers and volunteers in ministry with youth may find the unquestioning adulation of an infatuated young person can be very alluring, and adult leaders are not immune from sexual attraction for those whom they serve. To complicate matters, American popular culture encourages young people to “grow up” quickly. Material affluence, provocative clothing styles and the trend toward using make-up at an early age can create the illusion of maturity in a young person. But while popular culture often equates physical and emotional maturity, those in ministry must know the difference. Youth ministers and volunteers have the same needs as other human beings, but it is crucial that we not look to young people to fulfill those needs. If we are to be free to minister to youth, we must not develop an unhealthy dependence on them. Following are some ways in which the adult leaders can care for themselves so that they can more effectively serve young people:

- 1) Schedule regular time off and stick to it. If you are to properly serve young people you need to get away from them once in a while. Gently but firmly teach the youth to respect your private time. Of course, there will be unplanned times when you need to be present to a young person, but afterwards make sure you take time away from your ministry.
- 2) Develop interests outside of youth ministry. Church work can absorb one’s whole life, if one lets it. Seek out social and recreational opportunities in the community.
- 3) Develop relationships outside of youth ministry. While youth ministry is a form of friendship with you, it is not the kind of balanced friendship an adult can only have with another adult. Seek out healthy adult friendships which nurture and support you both personally and as a minister.
- 4) It is recommended that those serving in ministry maintain a relationship with a spiritual director. Seek a director with whom you are comfortable, one who is empathetic, experienced, insightful and one who has a healthy appreciation of his or her own spiritual journey. A good spiritual director is an invaluable asset.
- 5) If a situation arises in which you question your objectivity, or the appropriateness of your actions, you should seek the counsel of a qualified mental health professional. If you feel compelled to act in a way which you know to be unhealthy, inappropriate, or illegal, remove yourself immediately from the ministerial situation and seek professional counseling.

III. Christian Witness

Always keep in mind that Christianity is counter-cultural, and part of youth ministry is bearing witness to this. Young people today are under tremendous pressure to conform to societal values which are directly contrary to the values of the Gospel, and youth ministers are called to name this truth both in word and in lifestyle.

The way a minister acts, how he or she dresses, the language he or she uses, the jokes he or she tells, the objects he or she chooses to possess, the way in which he or she uses alcohol and tobacco; all of these things speak volumes to youth, who observe more than we often realize and are very perceptive when it comes to spotting inconsistencies in word and deed.

One is certainly entitled to a life of his or her own apart from ministry, but one who chooses youth ministry should appreciate the fact that his or her lifestyle is, in effect, part of the visible Christian witness he or she provides. Perhaps a good question for one to ask is, "Is there any aspect of my life which I would be ashamed to share with young people?" and, if so, "What can I learn from this about myself and my ministry?"

If you are like most who enter youth ministry, you probably can recall at least one time in your life when you were profoundly touched by a caring Christian presence. This person was Christ enfleshed for you. The nature of the Body of Christ is that those of us who have been touched by this living Christ are called to pass that healing touch on to others. You are called to be Christ enfleshed for the young people you serve. If you keep that as your focus, to act as Christ would act, your ministry will not only be beyond reproach, it will be a model of service to others.

I have read and agree to the standards of conduct as they are outlined above.

Signature of Adult Volunteer

Print Name

Date

Signature of Pastor/Pastoral Administrator or Delegate

Date

Parish

Original: Parish Office Copy
Copy: Volunteer

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR ADULT VOLUNTEERS

(Sample)

Qualities

- 1) Practices the Catholic faith.
- 2) Knows and supports the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- 3) Is prayerful.
- 4) Is comfortable relating to young people and genuinely likes teens.
- 5) Able to make a commitment and follow through.
- 6) Willing to serve and put others first.
- 7) Able to listen to and be available to teens.
- 8) Is enthusiastic.
- 9) Has a sense of humor.
- 10) Is trustworthy; must be of good character, reputation, background and record.

General Responsibilities

- 1) Cooperates with the Coordinator of Youth Ministry in implementing the goals and objectives of the parish youth program.
- 2) Is punctual and prepared for each meeting.
- 3) Notifies the Coordinator of Youth Ministry when there is a need to be absent.
- 4) Follows the Coordinator's rules of discipline.
- 5) Spends time talking to youth and sharing their faith.
- 6) Helps with set up and clean up.
- 7) Recognizes the importance of non-church events in the lives of young people and acknowledges (or attends) and affirms special activities (concerts, plays, sporting events, etc.) when possible.
- 8) Makes a special effort to acknowledge special times in your teens' lives (birthdays, achievements, etc.).
- 9) Meet and spends quality time with new teens.

If a volunteer's behavior is in conflict with the teachings of the Church, the adult volunteer is asked to leave.

**CHILD ABUSE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS
OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI AND
THE DIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY-ST. JOSEPH
FOR PRIESTS, PARISH ADMINISTRATORS, PARISH MINISTERS,
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, YOUTH MINISTERS,
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DIRECTORS,
ALL OTHER CHILD CARE GIVERS AND THEIR STAFFS**

WHAT MUST BE REPORTED?

Actual or suspected abuse or neglect of a child under 18. Abuse means any physical injury, sexual abuse or emotional abuse other than by accidental means. Discipline including spanking, so long as administered in a reasonable manner, is not abuse. Neglect is generally failure to give necessary and proper care to a child. You must report if you observe actual abuse or neglect; also, you must report if you have "reasonable cause to suspect" that a child has been abused or neglected by any person.

WHO MUST REPORT AND TO WHOM?

A teacher, child care giver, youth minister or other person with responsibility for the care of children who has direct knowledge of child abuse or has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse must notify the principal, program director, supervisor or "person in charge of the facility". This satisfies the reporting obligation of the teacher or other staff person or volunteer. However, that teacher or other staff person or volunteer may also report directly to the Missouri Division of Family Services (DFS).

The principal, program director, supervisor or "person in charge of the facility" must within 24 hours make a report, or cause a report to be made to the Division of Family Services (DFS) of actual or suspected child abuse or neglect reported to him or her by someone under his or her supervision. In addition, if the principal, program director, supervisor or "person in charge of the facility" personally becomes aware of, or has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, he or she has an obligation to make or cause a report to be made to DFS.

A priest has an obligation to report actual or suspected child abuse or neglect only if he is acting as a teacher or person with other responsibility for the care of children or if he is in a direct supervisory role for another staff member or volunteer who is acting as a person with responsibility for the care of children on behalf of the parish or other church institution. Obviously the confidentiality of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is respected in all situations.

TO WHOM IS THE REPORT TO BE MADE AND HOW?

State law requires the report to be made to the Missouri Division of Family Services. The statute contemplates oral reports to a hot line number which currently is 1-800-392-3738.

Abuse or suspected abuse within a parish should also be reported to the pastor/pastoral administrator at the earliest opportunity.

Diocesan policy requires any accusation or knowledge or suspicion of child abuse or neglect by anyone employed by the Diocese or a parish, including priests and religious, be reported to the Vicar General and to the appropriate diocesan office responsible for the ministry of the alleged abuser. The telephone number is 816-756-1850.

Past abuse allegedly performed by a priest, religious or lay church worker or volunteer on a person in his/her care who at the time was under 18 but who is now 18 or older need not be reported to the Division of Family Services. However, it should be reported to the Vicar General.

WHAT INFORMATION IS TO BE REPORTED TO THE DIVISION OF FAMILY SERVICES?

To the extent available, the names and addresses of the child and his/her parents or guardians; the child's age, sex and race; the nature and extent of the child's injuries, abuse, or neglect, including any evidence of previous injuries, abuse, or neglect to the child or his/her siblings; the name, age and address or the person responsible for the injuries, abuse or neglect if known; family composition; the name, address and occupation of the person making the report as well as where he/she can be reached; any other actions taken by the person reporting to document the abuse or neglect or to protect the child.

DOES THE MISSOURI STATUTE DEAL WITH CONFIDENTIALITY?

Yes, the state law requires confidentiality for the source of a report, but there are numerous specific exceptions.

ARE THE POLICE INFORMED?

If the Division of Family Services considers the claimed abuse serious enough to constitute a crime the DFS contacts the police as a matter of practice.

Office of Personnel and Planning
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