



Safe Environment Compliance, Charter Requirements

Response and Pastoral Support

Policy response to a report or claim of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult by clergy

The Diocese of Corpus Christi reports all complaints (or reasonable suspicions) of child abuse, or abuse of a vulnerable adult to the appropriate authorities, regardless of the time frame. The Charter for the Protection of Children and young people defines a “*vulnerable adult*” as an “*individual who habitually lacks the use of reason*”. The Diocese of Corpus Christi expands the vulnerable adult definition of the Charter to include the elderly, and those adults with physical or mental disabilities.

When a credible allegation is received, in accordance with Canon Law, the accused priest, deacon or other church personnel, a preliminary investigation will begin. During this time, the accused may be placed on administrative leave. The accused maintains the presumption of innocence and all appropriate steps are taken to protect the accused’s reputation. If the allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, every step possible will be taken to restore the good name of the clergy. The utmost care is taken to ensure for the privacy and confidentiality of those individuals who seek healing and protection from the Church.

The Diocese follows the guidance of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People when assessing fitness to serve in ministry after confirmation of abuse. Even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor, or vulnerable adult, no matter the time frame, may result in the cleric being permanently removed from ministry, and if warranted, dismissed from the clerical state. In addition, no priest or deacon who has committed an act of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult may be transferred from a ministerial assignment into any other diocese. The Diocese of Corpus Christi will not enter into settlement agreements which bind the parties to confidentiality, unless it is at the request of the victim.

In accordance with the Pastoral Manual, Section: Safe Environment, Page 26, Section 2, subsection 210: Every parish and mission must have a coordinator who administers the database for the Safe Environment Program. The parish or mission may hire a coordinator or contract with another parish or the diocese to maintain the information. Volunteers are not allowed to access the Safe Environment Program database.



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Office for Safe Environment Volunteer Review and Processing

The Office for Safe Environment thoroughly reviews all instances of volunteers with a criminal history. A criminal conviction does not automatically preclude a person from ministry or serving as a volunteer. However, crimes against a child or vulnerable adult, or any other offenses against the person will automatically prohibit a person from engaging in service. If an individual is currently on probation for a criminal offense, or has a pending, active criminal case, they will not be approved to provide ministry or volunteer in any capacity. If it is determined that a currently active volunteer has a pending or active criminal case, the individual may be asked to step down or cease their volunteer or paid position pending the disposition of the case.

If an applicant's application is rejected, a notice of rejection will be sent by correspondence to the applicant directly, and confidentially to the Pastor or principal at the location of ministry or service. The Diocese does not accept a volunteer wanting to complete community services hours in conjunction with a criminal offense without processing a criminal background check. A Pastor should be apprised of any potential risks involved in approving such volunteerism. The Office for Safe Environment and Child & Family Resources is available for immediate support and consultation.

In response to a complaint of abuse, boundary violation or other serious concern against church personnel

In the interest of protecting minors and vulnerable adults, the Diocese acts quickly and prudently after the receiving information of abuse or boundary violations by church personnel. The Diocese has the discretion to revoke Safe Environment certification based on allegations or concerns pertaining to the violating of ministerial boundaries, suspicions of abuse or alleged harm, or other serious concerns. Responsibility for adherence to the Diocesan Code of Conduct rests with each individual. Those who disregard the Code of Conduct and other Safe Environment and ministerial behavioral guidelines may be subject to remedial action. This remedial action may take various forms, from a verbal warning to removal from ministry, depending upon the specific nature and circumstances.

Diocesan Review Board

The Diocesan Review Board was established to offer confidential consultation and review of clergy abuse cases. The Diocesan Review Board also engages in reviewing policies, procedures, and protocols that assist the Office of Victim Assistance, and the Office for Safe Environment. The Review Board offers guidance and support to the Bishop concerning allegations of abuse based on their education and experience. Members serve upon written appointment by the Bishop for a set term of years, renewable for an additional term. The board meets annually, and as needed.



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Pastoral Support

The Bishop has instructed the Office of Victim Assistance to provide immediate support to victims of clergy abuse. This support extends to their loved ones and families. The support includes resources such as social services and counseling referrals. This continuum of care is provided with sincere commitment to support the healing of all involved. The Bishop may also meet directly to better understand and address the needs of abuse victims. All parties involved will be advised of the right to seek legal guidance and support to include consultation with local law enforcement.

The USCCB Charter requires every diocese to retain a policy statement in regards to the scourge of pornography

Pornography of any kind violates Church teaching and is a grave offense against human dignity. The possession of child pornography, even if the possessor is a minor themselves will be reported to local law enforcement entities. The Office of Victim Assistance will be engaged to ensure for the proper reporting of any suspicion of the possession or transmission of pornography of any kind.