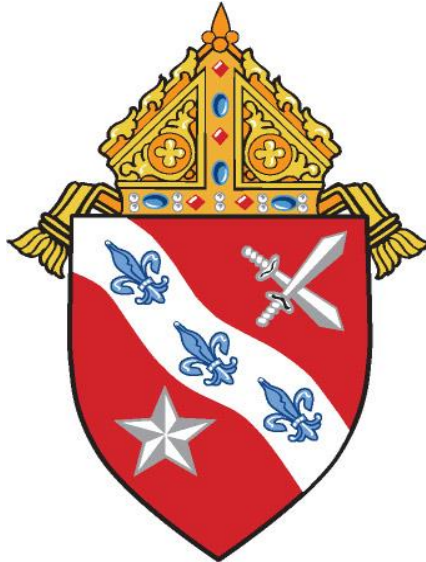


Diocese of Dallas



Youth Ministry Handbook on Risk Management and Safety when working with Middle & High School Youth

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Thank you to all those in Youth Ministry that have lived and worked with this document over the years in our Diocese.

Purpose of the Handbook

As adult leaders who work with young people in a variety of parish and diocesan settings, it is important that we be aware of our responsibility for the safety of the young people involved in our programs while they are in our care. Important aspects of our responsibility include clear communication with young people and parents, appropriate supervision for all activities, and proper maintenance of our facilities to reduce the possibility of accidental injury. It is the policy of the Diocese of Dallas to comply with all applicable legal standards to avoid and prevent accidents, injuries, and acts of misconduct. These safety and liability guidelines are offered to assist you in these efforts.

As adults involved in ministry, in addition to our concern for the spiritual and personal formation of young people, we must also be concerned for the safety of the young people and other adults involved in our parish and diocesan programs. The efforts used to minimize possible injuries to those who are in our care or on Church property can be broadly described as “risk management.” While no one can ever completely eliminate the possibility of injuries in every circumstance, Church employees and volunteers must, whenever possible, take reasonable steps to prevent, and protect those in their care from foreseeable and unreasonable dangers. Doing so not only benefits those in our care but also helps preserve valuable Church resources so that they can be used for ministry. As a result, it is important that all youth ministry leaders and key volunteers become familiar with and abide by these guidelines in connection with all Church youth activities.

A failure to take reasonable steps to protect those in our care may expose them to a risk of harm or injury and may also expose the parish, staff, and volunteers to legal liability. Understanding the most common legal issues that arise in an injury claim can help you ensure that your actions are consistent with what the law requires.

Legal claims for injuries suffered by a participant in a church youth ministry might allege that the church is responsible for:

- **1) a dangerous condition on church property that the church knew about or should have known about but did not fix;**
 - *Examples of this type of allegations include:*
 - *the church knew of an unreasonable trip hazard but failed to fix it, and a church guest was injured in a fall*
 - *the church failed to maintain its fire alarm system, and students were injured in a fire*
 - *the church should have known that a tree limb was dangling but failed to fix it, and the limb fell on a visitor’s car*

- **2) not doing something the church should have done; or**
 - Examples of this type of allegations include:
 - *The church failed to properly vet a charter bus company, and children on a youth trip were injured in a bus accident*
 - *the church failed to provide enough supervision for a youth retreat, and an unsupervised child was injured*
 - *the church failed to intervene in a bullying incident, and a child was injured*
 - *the church organized a rock-climbing trip but failed to provide proper training and safety equipment to youth participants and youth participants were injured.*

- **3) doing something the church shouldn't have done.**
 - Examples of this type of allegations include:
 - *a church volunteer had an inappropriate relationship with a child*
 - *a church staff member was roughhousing with children in the church youth ministry and unintentionally injured a child*

If a child or his or her parents can prove that one of the above occurred, that the parish had a duty to prevent the incident from occurring, and that the parish's failure to prevent the incident caused the child's injuries or other damages, the parish and the staff or volunteers involved might be held liable in court. The best way to prevent this result is to train staff and volunteers to keep children safe, enforce the policies communicated in that training, and provide periodic training refreshers and updates when appropriate. The guidelines and policies in this handbook are meant to be used as a resource for parishes in accomplishing these goals. Youth ministry workers should also consider the following specific issues, among others:

- Clear, comprehensive communication about youth ministry activities to the parents or other responsible adults for participating children fosters proactive problem-solving before an incident occurs.
- Clear communication of behavioral expectations and the consequences of a violation to both youth and parents before an activity begins helps youth ministry staff and volunteers enforce rules designed to keep participants safe.
- Safe transportation of youth to and from activities is of primary importance. Parishes are not responsible for ensuring that parents transport their own children safely but must comply with diocesan policies regarding transportation in arranging transportation for youth.
- Diocesan safe environment policies and civil laws regarding the reporting of suspected child abuse must be followed and enforced at all times.

- Areas of parish premises where youth ministry activities are held, and portions of the premises used to enter and leave those areas, should be maintained in a reasonably safe condition. Unsafe conditions should be promptly reported to parish personnel responsible for facilities maintenance or the Diocese Office of Risk Management. If an unsafe condition persists, call the Diocese Office of Risk Management.
- Youth ministry staff, as well as youth ministry volunteers who supervise activities without staff present, must have access to a working telephone during the activity and should be familiar with emergency exit routes, the location of fire extinguishers and first aid kits, and procedures to be followed in case of emergency.

This handbook is not meant to be a comprehensive handbook on Youth Ministry. Rather, this handbook serves to answer the most common questions and provide pertinent aspects of safety and risk management. It may not be comprehensive for all situations, so contact the Office of Risk Management or the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries for additional questions or best practices for implementation.

Thinking Like A Risk Manager

The law considers us responsible for the safety of those in our programs under two legal theories. Under the principle of “*tort liability*,” all the participants in our programs are considered “invitees” for whom we owe certain duties. If we fail in those duties due to negligence or improper conduct, we may be held liable for the consequences. Issues we need to consider under this legal theory are:

- All the issues concerned with clear communication of activity details with parents or legal guardians
- Clear communication of behavioral expectations of participants and the consequences of misbehavior
- Safe transportation
- The possibility of mistreatment or abuse of youth while in our programs.

Under the principle of “*premise liability*,” we are considered responsible for the safety of anyone who comes onto property which we are in possession or control of. If someone is injured while on our premises due to the unsafe condition of the property we may be held liable. Issues we need to consider under premise liability are:

- The proper installation and maintenance of buildings and equipment
- The proper maintenance of the grounds, driveways, parking lots, sidewalks and steps
- Emergency safety equipment and procedures such as exit lights, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and fire and tornado drills.

For a party to be held liable, negligence must be proven. There are four elements which must be present for legal negligence to be found: ***duty, violation of duty, proximate cause, and injury.***

The person charged with negligence must have had a ***duty***. In youth ministry, the person charged must have had a duty to the young person at that time. A youth ministry leader attending a public school football game where some of the teens he/she works with at church does not constitute a duty.

Negligence cannot exist if ***a violation of duty*** is not present. The courts understand that accidents and spontaneous actions can occur. If a teenager spontaneously hits another teenager while you are carrying out your duty, there is no violation. If, however, a teenager began throwing objects at another and you did nothing to stop this behavior, then you would be in violation of duty. Another example of violation of duty would be leaving a room full of teens without adult supervision to go make non-emergency phone calls when your presence could have prevented the injury.

The violation of duty must be the ***proximate cause*** of the injury. Here, the concept of foreseeability is important. Would proper supervision have prevented the injury? Would a reasonable person have foreseen that there is a likelihood of injury? Proximate cause is a complex legal concept. Youth ministry programs can pose special dangers when young people are not sitting safely in desks at church. For this reason, it is wise for youth ministry leaders to have on-going conversations about foreseeable dangers in regard to youth ministry events (on- and off-site) and determining what proper supervision requires to minimize injury.

The final element necessary for a finding of negligence is *injury*. In order to bring suit in a court of law, an individual has to have sustained an injury for which the court can award a remedy. Therefore, you left a group of 20 sixth graders for twenty minutes but there was no injury there could be no negligence (at least in a legal sense), though it certainly could constitute poor judgment. The best defense against negligence for any youth ministry program is a reasonable attempt to provide for the safety of all through the development of appropriate rules and regulations. The best defense for adult leaders is to implement the rules and regulations.

The following guidelines are meant to be taken seriously whether by paid or volunteer staff, full-time or part-time. By doing so we show our true care and concern for young people, their families, our parishes, and ultimately the diocese.

These guidelines are not meant to overwhelm. Many of us might say that we did not get into ministry to do this, but planning for the safety and well-being of our young people is in itself an act of caring. These guidelines, if learned and utilized, can become second nature. We invite you to refer to appropriate parts of the guidelines as you plan programs and events. As you gain experience, you will find that you will automatically include these safety and liability guidelines in all that you do.

These guidelines are divided into two parts. The first part deals with activities occurring on parish premises. The second part deals with issues surrounding activities occurring off the premises.

On-Site Parish Youth Ministry

“On-site parish youth ministry” refers to ministry with youth that takes place on parish property. This includes religious education classes, youth ministry activities, sports events, and any events in which young people are involved on your premises.

The safety and well-being of young people attending the various programs at the parish are the responsibility of the youth minister and other adult leaders responsible for the activities.

Annual Enrollment Forms/Medical Release Forms

Permission and Release forms are a responsible part of ministry with young people. They offer a basic communication vehicle between the parish and the parent/legal guardian. They also provide valuable information in case of a medical emergency. An Annual Youth Enrollment Form (see Forms Section) should be on file for every young person who is an active participant of a regularly gathered parish program, including any faith formation programs. These should be kept on file and renewed each year.

We all agree that distributing and collecting permission forms is always a difficult job. Finding creative ways to do this will help make it easier. Helping parents understand that their child is not registered for a program until a permission, medical release and/or travel release form is completed is important. The beginning of any annual program is a good time to collect this information as part of the registration process. Annual Enrollment Forms (see Forms Section) can be included with promotional materials that are provided. These forms should be readily accessible any time you gather youth on your campus. (NOTE: Youth programs, such as on-site large group evangelizing youth nights, that have open public invitation do not necessarily require annual registration for every attendee since these events are public. Also, guests of active participants may attend periodically without a permission form as well. However, it is prudent to collect registration when possible).

Diocesan Permission and Release forms contain space for adaptation to local parish use but pre-printed release and terms should remain intact. It is always important to double check all forms that you receive to make sure vital questions are completely filled out in pen or completed online, and that they are signed by the parent or legal guardian. An emergency situation is not the time to realize that a form is incomplete.

The Diocese of Dallas Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry pays for an online form collection tool called Permission Click (www.permissionclick.com) and is available at no cost for parishes to use for their youth, young adult, and campus ministries. This tool and its process for collecting online forms have been reviewed and approved by Diocesan Legal Counsel. Youth Ministry leaders can have an account created for free under the Diocesan paid service. Contact the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries to have your account created in the Diocese of Dallas portal and gain access to pre-made form templates and priority support/training.

Attendance

It is important to keep accurate records of attendance for regular parish youth programs in case there is ever a question whether a particular youth was on the premises for a certain activity. Attendance records should be archived according to the [Record Retention Policy](#) Schedule. Since many youth are able to drive themselves to the parish, or ride with someone else, there is always the possibility that they may leave home but not get to the activity.

In addition, a responsible adult supervisor should make a quick check of the parking lot and other accessible parish facilities a few minutes after an activity has begun. Sometimes youth will come onto the parish premises but not come to the activity. If youth are found, they should be invited to come to the activity or leave the premises.

Parishes should consider contacting parents of young people absent from an activity. Not only does this turn up any discrepancy about attendance, it also serves as a reminder that youth are welcome and wanted at events.

Arrival and Dismissal

The youth minister is responsible for young people from the time youth arrive for a scheduled activity until the activity ends and the youth leave the parish premises. A clear policy stating the arrival and dismissal time and location for young people should be developed and communicated to young people and parents. Usually, fifteen minutes before a program and fifteen to thirty minutes after a program offer ample arrival and departure time. The expected start and stop of supervision should also be defined in the annual enrollment process and should be decided based on parish circumstances and age development. For example: a parish might define that high school programming supervision starts once the teen comes inside and signs-in. Then, for middle school, the parish has parking lot volunteers that begin supervision the moment the youth exits the car when they arrived in.

Youth or groups of youth should never be left on the premises alone. The youth minister or the adult responsible for the program is to remain with the youth until all youth have left the parish premises. Consider the number of adults who remain on the premises in case of emergencies and to address safe environment concerns.

Sometimes it is necessary for a young person to leave a program early. At such times it is appropriate to require a note or telephone call from the parent or guardian requesting early dismissal. Youth ministry staff or volunteers should not attempt to physically prevent a young person from leaving an activity early but should, when it is safe and practical to do so, attempt to contact the young person's parent or legally responsible adult to inform them of the early departure.

Medical Injuries and Emergencies

Every parish should have a stocked, easily accessible first aid kit.

An Incident Report Form (see Forms Section) is to be filed in accordance with site procedures in the event of an injury or an emergency. Do not admit any liability or negligence or make any promises of payment or insurance coverage to the parties involved. In the event of an incident, first address safety concerns and notify emergency personnel if necessary. If questions later arise

regarding liability, politely refer them to the parish business manager with their questions. If the area where the incident occurred could cause injury to others, close it until it can be repaired. Any incident requiring medical treatment of a participant or a law enforcement response must be reported to the Diocese Office of Risk Management as soon as reasonably possible.

Building and Grounds

The youth minister should be aware of potential hazards regarding equipment, buildings, and grounds. While this is primarily the responsibility of the parish maintenance staff, the constant vigilance of everyone using the parish plant for activities will help prevent potential safety hazards. All adult leaders should know the location of the fire alarms and fire extinguishers and be familiar with all exit routes.

In the event that damage to property occurs, the youth minister or adult in charge should fill out the appropriate forms and file in accordance with site procedures. Incident Reports (see Form Section) should be completed for on-site events/activities as well as off-site events/activities.

Off-Site Parish Youth Ministry

Any program which takes young people away from the parish premises is considered “off-site parish youth ministry.” In providing a comprehensive youth ministry to youth of the parish, young people are frequently involved in the following experiences and activities that occur off parish premises. These activities are important components of a comprehensive youth ministry program but have their own set of safety issues which must be given the proper attention. The following are a few examples:

1. Retreats/lock-ins (day, evening, or overnight)
2. Special conferences or workshops out of town
3. Diocesan events
4. Service projects or field trips
5. Out of town trips to amusement parks, etc.
6. Recreational/sports activities
7. Camping trips or other outdoor activities

Permission/Medical Information Forms

Even though the Annual Permission Form provides a release and liability waiver in a blanket fashion, you still must get written permission from parents/legal guardians for each specific off-site event. The easiest way to do this is when you send out the event information (date, time, where to meet, what to bring, etc.) include a permission slip which must be signed and returned in order for each youth to attend the event. The form should provide parents with the important details about the trip as well as providing you with important information about the participant. We strongly recommend that a diocesan *Travel Release and Permission Form* (see Forms) be utilized for all off-site events and activities. Additionally, for all **out of state trips**, there should be irrefutable proof that a parent/guardian signed the form. Therefore, out of state forms should be notarized OR signed in the presence of the trip/ministry leader who already knows the parent or legally responsible adult.

It is recommended that all travel permission forms with medical information be easily accessible by a group throughout the event. This may be paper or electronic if always accessible. If a group divides up in different locations, consider how the forms can remain accessible. For example, if there are two buses, have two copies on each bus. If there are different workgroups going to different locations on a mission trip, divide the medical forms up for each group leader. Some ministries may choose to have each participant carry a copy of their own form in their credential.

Diocesan Permission and Release forms contain space for adaptation to local parish use but pre-printed release and terms should remain intact. It is always important to double check all forms that you receive to make sure vital questions are completely filled out in pen or completed online, and that they are signed by the parent or legal guardian. An emergency situation is not the time to realize that a form is incomplete.

The Diocese of Dallas Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry pays for an online form collection tool called Permission Click (www.permissionclick.com) and is available at no cost for parishes to use for their youth, young adult, and campus ministries. This tool and its process for collecting online forms have been reviewed and approved by Diocesan Legal Counsel. Youth

Ministry leaders can have an account created for free under the Diocesan paid service. Contact the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries to have your account created in the Diocese of Dallas portal and gain access to pre-made form templates and priority support/training.

Trip Roster and Itinerary left with Emergency Contact

A trip Roster and Itinerary listing all participants, their parent/emergency contact information, and trip schedule/destinations should be left at the parish or with an emergency contact person. In the event of an emergency, the contact can support the traveling ministry leader in contacting parents and working through the Crisis plan. Availability to electronic or paper copies of medical forms should also be left at the parish or with the home emergency contact. (See Youth Events and Crisis Plans section)

Site Selection

In selecting a site for an activity, it is important to do so with an eye for safety considerations, as well as cost and availability. Buildings, equipment, and grounds should be hazard free and properly maintained, and emergency medical facilities and law enforcement agencies should be within reasonable distances. A written agreement approved through the contract review process by the Diocese Office of Risk Management and/or Diocesan legal counsel must be signed by the facility and the Pastor or designee before the off-site activity begins. Refer to the Diocese Contracts Review Policy for further information. The Office of Risk Management may waive this requirement under appropriate circumstances (e.g., low-risk activities hosted in private homes).

Private Homes

Hosting ministry programs in private homes where a Safe Environment can be managed is an acceptable location for off-site ministry. Be aware that some homeowners may be reluctant to host certain activities in private homes because of the potential for homeowner liability in the event of a claim. Referring such homeowners to their insurance agent to discuss coverage for claims may help alleviate any concerns. Ultimately, however, neither the parish nor the Diocese can guarantee a hosting homeowner that no claim will arise from an activity hosted at their home. If a homeowner cannot resolve any concerns before hosting, the parish should graciously find an alternative venue in compliance with applicable policies.

Transportation

Because you need to get your youth to the off-site ministry event or experience, transportation will always be an issue. Use the diocesan Vehicle Safety Policy guidelines regarding volunteer drivers and vehicles provided by the Office of Risk Management. A diocesan Volunteer Driver Form (see Forms Section) is required for all volunteer drivers for youth ministry events. This form should be filled out and signed once a year and kept on file. Please also refer to the article *USING CHARTER BUS COMPANIES OR RENTAL VANS FOR TRANSPORTATION* found later in this handbook.

Medical Injuries and Emergencies

All of the guidelines previously cited apply. A well-stocked first aid kit and the permission/medical release forms should travel with you at all times. Copies of all forms should be left at the parish office. Here is a sampling of first aid kit contents:

Incident Report Forms	Flashlight	Aloe Gel
Band-Aids-Variou Sizes	Batteries	A Bottle Of Water
Alcohol Prep Packages	Pen	Granola Bar
Neosporin	Safety Pins	Adhesive Tape
Latex-free personal protection gloves	Post-It Notes	Eye Drops
Peroxide	Rubber Bands	Thermometer Strips
Scissors	Carmex	Dental Floss
Tweezers	Gauze bandages of various sizes	Ace Wrap Bandage
Sharpie Marker	Feminine Care Products	Antibacterial Wipes
Pencils	Sunscreen	

Please refer to the youth's medical release for parental permission before dispensing any over-the-counter medications. It is a good idea to have on hand some hard candy (for when someone has a tickle but does not need medicine). Some suggestions of over-the-counter medicines that you may want to have on hand are:

Non-aspirin pain reliever (Ibuprofen / Tylenol)
Throat Lozenges / Cough Drops
Decongestant
Antacid (Pepto or Tums)
Antihistamine (Benadryl cream and capsules)

All medications and treatments dispensed should be noted in a first aid log as well as on the participant's event specific permission form. (Noting medication/treatment dispensed, date, time, amount, and by whom)

Bus Boxes

When traveling with youth, it is always a good idea to be prepared for the unexpected. Here are some ideas of what to bring along with you, when you take your youth on an outing.

- Roll of paper towels
- Handi-wipes
- Box of tissue
- Large trash bags
- Small can liner bags
- Hard candies – for coughers on overnight or long trip
- Large ziplock bag with: pencils, pens, index cards, masking tape, rubber bands
- Small bottles of water
- Duct tape

Outdoor Activities

Youth ministry frequently involves young people in outdoor activities. These activities offer young people opportunities to form healthy friendships, experience Christian community, experience the beauty of God's creation in nature, and enable stronger intergenerational relationships to develop. Recreational opportunities are designed for youth enjoyment with the inclusion of all participants.

While the normal recommendation for most activities is one adult to every ten youth for high school teenagers and one to seven for junior high youth (with a minimum of two at any time), if you are taking a group camping, hiking, to the lake or beach, or some other outdoor activity the ratio of youth to adults should increase to at least one adult for every five youth to compensate for the greater need for supervision and possible emergencies. Adult to youth ratios should always be evaluated and adjusted based on expected level of risk.

Camp Facilities

When choosing a campsite for camping, retreat, or some kind of outdoor adventure, it is a good practice to see the camp first hand during the planning stage. What shape is the camp in? How hospitable is the camp staff? How difficult will it be to get quick medical attention if necessary? Is the camp accredited and by whom? The most widely recognized accreditation is with the American Camping Association (ACA). This organization maintains a strict set of safety standards for staffing, buildings, programs, and services for all types of camps, religious and secular alike. Also consider camps that have already negotiated a facility use agreement with other parishes following the Contract Review policy. (Business managers can view this information in the Agiloft Contract Reviewing tool).

Water Activities

Water activities require special precautions. A certified lifeguard must be present when swimming at a public pool. Other swimming activities such as a private pool, a lake, or the beach should be properly supervised according to the risk. Youth must use appropriate certified life preservers when using any kind of water craft and must be instructed on the proper use of the craft before using it. Motorized craft must be driven by those aged 25 or older who have been properly instructed in the use of the craft. Other requirements may apply. Contact the Diocese Office of Risk Management if your planned event includes water activities.

Using Charter Bus Companies or Rental Vans for Transportation

In many youth ministry settings, it is often necessary and even preferable to use chartered bus transportation rather than personal vehicles. Buses provide safe and secure transportation to off-campus events and allow for community building along the way. Additionally, your adult chaperones are better able to concentrate on their tasks of insuring a safe environment and building relationships with the young people. Charter bus contracts must be reviewed by the Office of Risk Management before they are signed by the parish. – See [Bus Transportation Policy](#) for full details.

Regarding van transportation whether rented or privately owned, it is never permissible to transport young people in a van designed for more than 10 persons. Any rental van contracts should be checked by the Diocesan Risk manager before signing. – See [Vehicle Safety Policy](#) for full details.

Here are a few things to check out BEFORE signing a contract with a charter bus company:

- If you are new to this type of transportation or are considering companies that you have not used before, it is always best to have your business manager check the Agiloft Contract Reviewing Tool first to see which companies have recently completed contracts with other parishes and ministries.
- The diocesan Contract Review Policy requires that charter bus contracts be provided to the Office of Risk Management for review before they are signed by the parish.
- Be sure to check out the company's current safety record even if you have used them before. In addition to their own website and information, they should always be willing to point you to their Transportation Carrier Safety Snapshot from the United States Department of Transportation.
- All charter bus companies should be able to provide you with a written certificate of insurance which should list the church as an 'additional insured' and be kept on file at your parish. Your business manager should be able to provide you with minimum limits of liability which are required.
- If you plan to show movies on the trip, ask your bus company if they have a site license for videos to be played on their buses. Remember, even if your parish has a CVLI site license, it only covers videos shown in your facilities, not in a charter bus. If they do not have a license, urge them to obtain one or plan ahead and contact the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation or the individual studio yourself.
- Make sure that you have an accurate list of all passengers for each bus. Keep track of changes when people switch buses. Make sure that a medical permission form for each participant is available on the bus on which they are riding. It may be easiest if you have multiple copies of all forms (one packet per bus) in case someone switches buses.
- Make sure you have adequate adult coverage on each bus and that both the young people and the adult chaperones know what conduct is and isn't appropriate. All safety rules should be enforced and driver distractions and property damage should not be tolerated.
- Trash bags should be readily available, and proper etiquette dictates that all trash should be removed from the bus upon disembarking. Please inform the driver of any spills and have adults double-check to make sure all personal items are removed.
- Before resuming the trip, take the time to ensure that all participants are back on the proper bus after any stops. Checklists, head counts, and the buddy system are all ways to help ensure you never leave a young person behind.

- Have a crisis plan in case of an accident or breakdown. Think this through ahead of time. Have adults familiar with your plan on each bus. Make sure they have charged mobile phones and a list of contact numbers for other adults. Contact the Diocese Office of Risk Management if you have questions or need assistance in creating a crisis plan for a particular trip.
- Finally, after the trip, let the company know how your drivers did. They should be recognized for their safety and professionalism. On the other hand, the company should be very concerned if there were any problems. In the case of an unsafe driver, you might be saving the next group from a tragedy! Please notify the Office of Risk Management of any safety concerns about any transportation vendor.

Supervision and Supervisors

Any activity involving young people needs to have appropriate adult supervision. We have been entrusted with the children of the families in our parishes, and we must take care not to violate that trust. This means providing reasonable and prudent supervision that is equal to or exceeds the supervision reasonable parents would give their own children. As always, all paid staff and volunteers must adhere to the [Diocesan Safe Environment Program](#).

Behavioral Guidelines

Each parish should have clear and consistent behavioral guidelines which specify the expected behavior of both adults and young people at all activities. These guidelines should be written and publicized in the promotional material for activities and programs. Guidelines should be orally reviewed with the participants on a regular basis. New participants should also be briefed as they enter into the program.

Minimal guidelines should include:

1. All youth and adults are expected to fully participate in all activities unless otherwise excused.
2. Anyone under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, should not be allowed to participate. Alcohol should not be served at any youth event where young people under the age of 21 are present. This includes all on-site and off-site youth ministry activities.
3. Everyone is expected to respect all other participants in the program or activity. No physical or verbal harassment and no possession of weapons of any kind will be tolerated.
4. All participants are expected to be building community with the entire group. There should be no exclusive coupling during an activity (no kissing, necking, or other intimate or inappropriate sexual activity).
5. Anyone found in violation of these guidelines may be subject to immediate dismissal from the activity and may be prohibited from attending future activities. If necessary, a parent or guardian will be called to pick youth up from the activity.

In addition to the minimal guidelines, additional guidelines may need to be included for certain activities, as well as curfews and boundaries. A sample Youth Code of Conduct and Adult Code of Conduct may be found in the Forms Section and can be added as a section of an Off-Site Travel Release Form. These are templates that are to be updated per group per event.

The consequences for violation of the behavioral guidelines must be clearly stated and fairly and consistently enforced. Violation of guidelines, especially those involving illegal or immoral activity, should be reported to parents.

Adult Leadership

The adult involved in youth ministry is to demonstrate by example the values which reflect Gospel love and compassion.

All adult leaders should be persons of maturity possessing a sensitivity to adolescents. Adult leaders are expected to demonstrate a consistent behavior which respects his/her own dignity as well as the dignity of the youth. Respect for the individual, for the premises, and for the law are integral to adult leaders. Any adult wishing to be involved in youth ministry who demonstrates less than a responsible leadership

style should not be involved with youth. Leaders need to be screened, cleared, and in compliance with the [Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Dallas](#).

In youth ministry, it is essential that the adult:

1. Behaves in a fashion appropriate for the activity
2. Never touches in an immodest fashion any youth
3. Refrains from any sexual, sexist, or racist comments
4. Refrains from obscene language
5. Follows the appropriate behavioral guidelines set for the young people, such as refraining from alcohol

The Youth Minister Leader is responsible for the selection, training, and supervision of the other adults involved in various roles in any youth activity. The Youth Ministry Leader should invite other adults into youth ministry roles only when the above attitudes and behaviors have been demonstrated.

The Youth Ministry Leader is to clearly formulate the responsibilities for the adults of each activity. The specific roles of catechist, program leader, sponsor, or chaperone need to be understood. The Youth Ministry Leader should be quick to point out to any adult a breach of the expected behaviors and responsibilities. Any adult not strictly following the expected behaviors and responsibilities must not be permitted to continue as an adult leader.

The diocese has a significant responsibility to ensure that positive steps are taken to identify those persons that may have had prior personal experiences in the sexual misconduct area. Adults who have regular contact with young people (both employees and volunteers) should be screened, cleared, and trained and must comply with the [Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Dallas](#). This ongoing compliance must be made a condition of employment or, for volunteers, a condition for working with youth. Individuals with knowledge about violations of Diocesan policy should call the Chancellor or the Safe Environment Director of the Diocese (visit www.cathdal.org for current contact information), or they may write to them at the Diocese of Dallas, P.O. Box 190507, Dallas, TX 75219. A report to the Diocese does not relieve the individual from reporting abuse as required by the Texas State Law. (See page 35 of this handbook or website for reporting steps).

Adult/Youth Ratio

It is important to consider the adult to youth ratio at every youth ministry event whether it is held on your parish grounds or elsewhere.

The official diocesan recommendation is that you must evaluate this ratio for each event based on the level of “risk” for that event; however, there must ALWAYS be a *minimum* of two cleared and trained adults at any gathering.

For instance, if you are on church grounds and in a secure area of the building where no one will be accessing the area except for cleared volunteers who will be working with you, the risk will be lower than if you were in a public access area with non-cleared adults coming and going constantly through or near your area. Other things to consider for on-campus events might be:

- Will you be splitting the group into smaller groups which might be meeting separately for a period of time in different areas?

- Are restrooms accessible only to your group or are they open to the public at the same time you are meeting?
- Will you be moving the group outside for part of the time to a playground or volleyball area?
- Do you need to be able to monitor the parking lot for teens who will be driving their own vehicles?
- Will there be a set time for beginning and ending the activity or will it be a come-and-go type of event?

All of these things affect how many cleared adults you will need to cover different areas, groups, or times.

For off-campus events, the risk would generally be considered higher, and therefore, a higher adult to youth ratio would be necessary. (A ratio of 2 adults to 5 youth is considered 'higher' than a ratio of 2 adults to 10 youth.) Some things to consider would be:

- What type of transportation will be used to get to the event? (personal vehicles, charter bus, or other means?)
- A weekend hike in the wilderness might actually require a lower ratio than handing out bag lunches to homeless people in an inner-city setting.
- What is the possibility that a young person might get sick or injured and need to be transported away from the group to a medical facility? Is your ratio enough that adults could be used to transport the youth and still have enough to cover the rest of the group?
- In general, overnight activities involve higher risk than day-camp events.

Additionally, the primary adult chaperones are to be at least 21 years of age. Your leadership team may include trained and cleared young adults between the ages of 18 and 21, but it is not recommended that they be counted in your needed adult to youth ratio. Instead, young adults 18-21 may be considered 'chaperones-in-training' and given adult tasks and responsibilities that are within their capabilities based on their levels of maturity and experience. If you have any question about this, it is always prudent to include your pastor and/or safe environment director in the discussion and decision-making process.

Always remember, the goal is to provide a 'safe environment' for all the young people whenever they are in your care. Look at the times and areas where there might be a risk to that and make sure you have enough adult coverage to minimize that risk, with a minimum of two cleared adults with any young people at any time.

Driving Caravans with Personal Vehicles

There are times when youth events utilize volunteer drivers in personal vehicles that drive multiple cars together in a driving caravan/driving train (See Vehicle Safety Policy and the Off-Site Parish Youth Ministry section in this document). Each entity should define how to maintain a Safe Environment and have a proper adult to youth ratio in driving train situations. Some parishes decide the surest way to do this is to have two adults in each vehicle. Other parishes create an intentional training plan, guidelines, and a volunteer management plan to provide a Safe Environment. For example, the ministry leader recruits trusted cleared adult volunteers over the age of 21, trains them on the safety rules listed on the Volunteer Driver Form, and allows one adult to drive a vehicle filled with more than one youth. The expectation is set that the driving train is to depart at the same time and arrive at the final destination without making side-stops. They are instructed to contact the group leader in emergency stopping situations. Through proper volunteer training and management, many have found that this driving train method creates the required Safe Environment with a minimal number of adults in each vehicle.

Overnight Accommodations

Separate by Gender - In general, there should never be mixed gender gatherings in sleeping areas. Whether you are camping in tents, using a retreat house, or hotel rooms, boys should never be in the girls' sleeping area and vice versa. It is also wise to restrict any social gatherings to appropriate common areas. An exception to the separation by gender is when a married couple or a whole family stays in their own tent or hotel room together.

Accommodations Adults Separate from Youth - While adults have supervision responsibilities, they should also observe restrictions about being in the sleeping areas of the opposite gender. With the exception of large dormitory sleeping accommodations (at camps or pilgrimages) or immediate family members staying with only their own children/siblings/grandchildren, adults and youth should never room or tent together.

Pastoral Care

The youth minister and other adult leaders often find themselves in the role of counselors for youth. Many of the situations that are surfaced are simply the normal struggles of adolescent growth, but at times you may be confronted with crisis issues which may be life-threatening to the young person. The way in which you respond and what you say may have potential legal implications of which you should be aware.

First, you are, most likely, not a professional counselor. Therefore, your role is limited to compassionate listening and spiritual counsel. Anyone needing professional help should be referred to the appropriate professional. It is important that the young people we work with understand the nature and scope of our role and the assistance we have to offer.

Whenever you meet with a young person in a "one-on-one" situation, it is important to do so in a place where you are not too isolated and where you are visible to others. Leave the door to your office open a bit. Make sure someone sees and knows when the young person arrives and leaves. This policy protects our young people and will help protect you from any false perceptions or accusations of sexual misconduct while with a young person.

In the event that a young person is left at an activity (on-site or off-site) and an adult is to provide a ride home, it is appropriate that someone else be aware of the situation (pastor, youth minister, PCL, etc.). Let the other person know when the young person is leaving and when he or she arrives home. The parent/guardian should also be contacted.

Be aware of the warning signs for alcoholism and drug dependency, eating disorders, depression and suicide. Refer youth to a trained counselor if you are counseling someone dealing with one of these crisis issues or if you are asked to intervene in a situation where one of these is occurring.

Confidentiality

Adults should generally treat information shared by youth ministry participants as confidential. However, the law requires that certain information be reported even if the person sharing it would prefer that it stay confidential. The Diocesan Safe Environment Program explains reporting requirements in more detail. All reports of child abuse must be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Additionally, any information indicating a risk of harm to self or others (e.g., threats of suicide,

plans to physically injure another person) should be reported to the child's parent or legally responsible adult and to the authorities, if necessary.

Child Abuse or Misconduct

Please go to *Diocesan Safe Environment Program* for information about reporting procedures.

In conclusion, these safety and liability guidelines are meant to assist adults in the parish who work with young people. They should be shared and discussed with all adults in the parish who are involved in any way with young people.

Healthy Play and Recreation

The following reflection and worksheet was prepared by Fr. Joe Hannappel of the Diocese of Grand Island. We thank him for sharing these with us.

The way we play should complement and reflect the goals, objectives, and values of the rest of our programming. In other words, if our programming is attempting to unify the group, our play needs to be unifying. So, if our play creates winners and losers, embarrasses people who aren't very bright or very athletic, or is funny only at the expense of a small group, then the result will not be a unified group, but a divided group.

Sometimes, at retreats and programs, we're asked to do something that seems simple and harmless, but once we do it, we are laughed at because of the real "punch line" or meaning of what we've just said or done. Sometimes on "trust walks," people "forget" to tell us about a tree branch or a puddle — or people "tell us" about the one that isn't really there!

These experiences do not create a unified, trusting community. They divide the group and cause suspicion and anxiety — even if the "team" is preaching trust and unity. In fact, a team that preaches trust and unity, yet practices deceit and division creates an emotional conflict in the participants who feel pressured to "trust" an untrustworthy group. It is exactly this situation we wish to avoid. It helps us to stay true to the Gospel if we have some concrete guidelines to help us evaluate our activities.

Questions to Consider when Evaluating an Activity

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | 1) Does it belittle or embarrass any person or persons? |
| Yes | No | 2) Does it give an undue advantage to the very bright, the very athletic, or very highly skilled, so that the group might be divided? |
| Yes | No | 3) Is it, or can it be, sexually suggestive? |
| Yes | No | 4) Is there sexually stimulating body contact? |
| Yes | No | 5) Are many people "left out" for too long of a time? |
| Yes | No | 6) Is it degrading to some person or a group of people? |
| Yes | No | 7) Can someone easily or possibly get hurt? |
| Yes | No | 8) Does it seem to create an "inner circle" of "elite" folks who are "in the know" or who "win"? |
| Yes | No | 9) Does it ask the group to trust in a situation that is untrustworthy? |
| Yes | No | 10) Does it waste food or show lack of respect for the environment? |

Dangerous games and situations

Everyone wants to have fun but follow these safety principles for safe fun:

- * Avoid games that might result in headfirst collisions with other people or natural objects.
- * Avoid games that incite reckless or overaggressive behavior.
- * Avoid games that are hard to supervise. If you can't stop an activity quickly, you don't have enough control.
- * Avoid pile on games.

Sport games and physical challenge activities

Minimize risk by using the following guidelines:

- * Don't play on an athletic field or in an area without first inspecting it for hazards and dangerous debris.
- * Don't mix big and small, weak and strong kids in contact sports. Don't make everyone in your group play the game. The reluctant participant is often the first one hurt.
- * Don't incite or encourage aggressive or rough play.
- * Don't let the athletic or challenge equipment be used without supervision.
- * Don't hesitate to step in and stop a situation that is getting too rowdy, rough, or uncontrolled.

Youth Events and Crisis Plans

A crisis plan is a plan for what to do in case of a crisis. It needs to be event and group specific. And since they are specific to the type of trip, age of participants, lodging, transportation, etc., each crisis plan may look different.

Essentially, when planning a youth trip, try to think through every possible emergency situation and know what to do in each case. Let other leaders know the plan(s) and what part they would be expected to play in handling the crisis. Finally, make sure all participants know when to use emergency contact information and who to call.

Here are some things to think about in developing a plan:

- Do you have a medical permission form for all participants that will allow you to obtain medical help while away from your campus? This should include important medical history items, insurance information, medications currently taken and/or allowed, and any medical allergies. It should also have emergency contact information for getting in touch with parents. This form should be easily accessible at all times, and it is also best to make sure a second set is available back at the parish with an emergency contact.
- Do you have a first aid kit or at least know where first aid may be obtained rapidly in the hotel or at the event center?
- Do you know who emergency contacts are at the event center? How to reach them quickly? When to (and when not to) call 9-1-1? At many of our conferences, we are instructed that we will get quicker response by using the convention center emergency phones than by calling 9-1-1. This is good information to know.
- Do all participants know the names and mobile phone numbers of your main leaders?
- You should have a plan in case of a major emergency – fire, act of terrorism, natural disaster, etc. All participants should know where the group meeting place will be if there is a disaster at the hotel. Where will you meet if there is a disaster at the event center? All participants should know to call in to the leader’s mobile phone as soon as possible if they are not able to make it to the meeting place right away.
- Do you have a plan of response in case of a death, serious injury, or disaster in the group? Your pastor and his emergency response team should be in this plan so that he can physically go to the parents or next-of-kin to notify and update them. You should also include contact information for our diocesan communications director and our diocesan safe environment director in this plan. Also, someone on this team should be in charge of being the “first contact back home” in case of any emergency. This will allow the leader at the scene to have just one person to make a call to, then they can continue to care for the group itself. This person should have all emergency contact numbers with them at all times that the group is gone and also be constantly available 24/7 by phone while the group is away.

While this may sound like a lot at first, crisis planning is a very necessary part of maintaining a safe environment for any group. Once a crisis plan has been created for one trip, it’s usually fairly easy to adjust the plan to be event-specific and used for the next one.

Non-Parish Based Organizations (NPBO's) & Visiting Speakers Policies

Non-parish based organizations

- **Non-parish based organizations** (Catholic organizations that are not a parish ministry) requesting to use parish facilities are required to register with the Diocesan Pastoral Center according to the NPBO Policy.
- See [Diocesan NPBO Policy](#) for full details.

Visiting Speakers from Outside the Diocese of Dallas:

- All **clergy** from outside of our diocese must be on file with the Diocese of Dallas Chancellor's Office before being allowed to minister within Dallas. Your pastor knows the required protocol for bringing in ordained clergy from outside this diocese.
- All **presenters/speakers** (individuals, musicians, groups, etc.) that come from outside the Diocese of Dallas and are invited to speak on issues of Catholic doctrine, tradition, ritual, etc. must present a current letter of suitability or affidavit from their bishop or superior. That document should be sent to the Safe Environment Office, along with the topic they will address, prior to the event. In the case of lay presenters, the individual should present a letter of suitability from his/her pastor or other superior. These documents will be maintained on file and in the speakers' database at the Diocesan Pastoral Center.
- See [Visiting Speakers Policy](#) for full details.

Self-Assessment: How Safe Is Your Youth Ministry?

Volunteer Leaders

- Have my volunteer leaders gone through a screening and training process that includes written application, reference forms, background checks, interviews, and annual training?
- Have my volunteer leaders been screened for any prior criminal, sexual abuse, or physical abuse accusations or violations?
- Have my volunteer leaders been trained for the job I have asked them to do?
- Have I trained volunteers in general safety procedures, and do I discuss specific safety procedures with them prior to an activity or event?
- Do my volunteers understand and practice our prescribed standard of “safe conduct” with youth to avoid any suspicion of sexual misconduct?
- Do my volunteers know their specific jobs at the events they attend?
- Do I have an appropriate adult-youth ratio at every event?

Youth Information

- Do I have an Annual Youth Enrollment Form signed by parent(s) for each committed and regularly attending participant?
- Do I have current phone numbers so I can contact parents in case of emergency?
- Are parents fully informed (in writing) about the activities in which their children will be involved?
- If I have to take any youth to the hospital, am I prepared to answer questions I will be asked about personal information, medical information, and insurance?

First Aid and Emergency Response

- Are members of my youth ministry team trained in a certified first aid course?
- Is a person trained in first aid present at all of our youth activities and trips?
- Is our first aid kit adequately stocked and available at all of our youth activities and trips?
- Do I carry with me phone numbers of people who should be contacted in the case of an emergency (ambulance, police, ministry supervisor, parents)?

Drivers and Vehicles

- Do we have a *current* Volunteer Driver Form on file for all drivers?
- Do we have a written policy regarding driving standards and who is allowed to drive for all the activities and trips?
- Do we only use drivers who are qualified and responsible?
- Do we prohibit youth from driving other youth to our activities?

- Do we require the use of seat belts at all times?
- Do we regularly check for safety the vehicles we use, including fluids, brakes, tires, and the like?

Planning and Preparedness

- Do we have a clear written set of basic safety rules for the activities of our youth ministry?
- Do we have sufficient insurance coverage for both leaders and kids in our youth ministry?
- While preparing for an event, do I inspect the physical facilities or location and look for any safety hazards?
- To prepare for an event, do I walk through the proposed activities to anticipate what risks are involved?
- Do I think through a worst-case scenario to identify potential problems and to plan responses to these problems?
- When an activity seems dangerous, do I have the wisdom and courage to stop it regardless of the reaction of the participants involved?

Analysis: Review these questions and their answers with your supervisors and your volunteer staff. Then decide together what you can do to improve the protection you provide for the participants in your youth ministry.

Copyrights and Video Licensing

“It is illegal and immoral to reproduce copyrighted texts and music by any means without written permission of the copyright owner. The fact that these duplicated materials are not for sale but for private use does not alter the legal or moral situation of copying without permission.” (Music in Catholic Worship #78, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1982)

This would also include any media technologies that are currently and formerly used.

The Diocese recognizes that unlawful copying and use of copyrighted materials contributes to higher costs for materials, lessens the incentives for development of quality educational materials, and fosters an attitude of disrespect for law which is in conflict with the educational goals of the Diocese of Dallas.

It is the intent of the Diocese of Dallas to comply with the provisions of the Copyright Act of 1976 and all subsequent amendments to copyright law.

There are several good sources to go to for answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ’s). The questions on the following pages are adapted from:

Copyright misconceptions about showing movies at youth group

<http://www.studentministry.org/copyright-misconceptions-about-showing-movies-at-youth-group/>

Motion Picture Licensing Corporation – FAQ’s

<http://www.mplc.org/page/faqs>

For further study and more information, a library of factsheets may be accessed at www.copyright.gov. A complete version of the U.S. Copyright Law (October 2009) may be accessed online at <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/circ92.pdf>.

GUIDELINES FOR USE OF VIDEO RECORDINGS

The FBI warning says that I can’t charge money for people to watch the movie so my event is ok.

The FBI warning actually pertains to an individual showing a movie within their home.

As long I am using the movie as a church event I am within the copyright laws.

This is a false statement because the only instance in which a movie may be screened, outside of a home, without a license, is in a non-profit educational setting with “face-to-face instruction.”

We own the DVD, so do we still need a license to view or show it in public?

Yes. The location requires a license regardless of who owns the audiovisual work. While you may own the actual DVD, you are only granted the right to view it in your home, not to perform it in public.

We don't charge admission. Do we still need a license?

Yes. A license is required regardless of whether an admission fee is charged. However, the Umbrella License covers only those situations where admission is not charged.

We're a non-profit organization. Do we still need a license?

Yes. Under the law, it doesn't matter if you're a non-profit or for-profit organization. You are required to have a public performance license to show motion pictures and other audiovisual works.

Is there a teaching exemption for educational purposes?

There is a "face-to-face teaching exemption" that applies only to full-time non-profit educational institutions and only if the teacher is present in the room, the showing takes place in a classroom setting, and the movie is used as an essential part of the current curriculum being taught. Some people are of the opinion that youth ministries and religious education programs of parishes with parochial schools would be able to claim this exemption assuming the above criteria are met. This is still legally unclear. Outside of a private or public school application, it remains ethically and legally advisable to always obtain a license.

We are only showing a one- or two-minute scene. Do we still need a license?

Yes, some people think that they do not need a public performance video license because they are only using a short scene, they are not getting paid for it, or because they are giving the studio free advertising. Those assertions are all incorrect.

What is a CVLI license for showing videos?

A parish may purchase an 'umbrella' license to show movies in its facilities. The license offered by Christian Video Licensing International (CVLI) was created to serve the video licensing needs of Christian faith-based communities with a simple, affordable license. Through an agreement with studios and producers, the CVLI Church Video License provides legal coverage for churches and for other ministry organizations to show DVDs and videocassettes of motion pictures. Coverage includes playing just a few seconds of a movie all the way up to showing the full-length feature. The Church Video License is one of the most cost effective and convenient ways for churches and other ministry organizations to protect themselves from the possibility of being fined for illegal use of DVDs and videocassettes. CVLI currently covers over 60,000 churches, camps, Christian schools and childcare centers across North America.

My church has the CVLI license, so we can show movies at any church event that we do.

This license only pertains to a church showing movies "in its facility(ies)." This means that if you have a current CVLI license, you may show most legally obtained movies in or on your church property (including outside the building for an outdoor movie).

What do you mean by "most" movies?

The CVLI license only covers those movies produced and/or distributed by CVLI affiliated motion picture companies only. Currently, CVLI has licensing agreements with over 400 producers including most major studios.

What if I don't want the expense of an annual umbrella license?

You may be able to contact the motion picture company and get written permission to show the movie. As the copyright holder, if it is the copyright holder, it can waive its rights and grant a church or ministry permission to show the movie. If you want to do this, do it well in advance, the process is slow.

Since I'm not charging a fee, I am showing the movie inside of my church, and I have the CVLI license, I can advertise my event in any fashion that I want.

The CVLI licensing terms state, "No specific titles, or any characters from such titles, or producers' names will be advertised or publicized to the general public unless authorized by certain producers."

We rent out our facility to other groups. Can we be held liable for copyright infringement by them?

Yes, the facility owner can be held vicariously liable or considered a 'contributory infringer.' However, the CVLI license applies to the 'facility' and 'location,' not just the organization itself.

What about showing movies on charter bus trips?

The CVLI license is a "site" license issued for use at your facility. Unless the bus is owned by the church, a site license would not cover showing a movie there. Check with your bus company to see if they may already have a site license for their buses. If not, plan ahead and contact the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (mplc.com) or the individual studio for permission and licensing.

The Diocese of Dallas strongly upholds the copyright laws of the United States and of other countries. All employees and volunteers within the Diocese of Dallas must adhere to these laws. Plainly stated, the making of unauthorized copies of all copyrighted material is illegal. However, in many cases, permission can be obtained. You must contact the copyright owner or licensing agent prior to use or duplication.

Code of Ethics for Youth Ministry Leaders

The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry has developed the following code of ethics for youth ministry leaders. The Diocese of Dallas has adopted this code of ethics for all youth ministry leaders. This code of ethics is intended for youth ministry leaders regardless of employment status within the church. While this code may be used in conjunction with existing diocesan policies, protocols or codes, it is not intended to supersede them.

Professional Ethical Obligations

1. Ministerial Role

- a. Youth ministry leaders work collaboratively with the pastor (and/or other supervisors) and associates in ministry.
- b. Youth ministry leaders faithfully represent the teachings of the Catholic Church with integrity in word and action.
- c. Youth ministry leaders are competent and receive education and training commensurate with their role(s) and responsibilities (§ 231, Code of Canon Law).
- d. Youth ministry leaders respect the diversity of spiritualities in the faith community and will not make their personal form of spirituality normative.

2. Inclusion

- a. Youth ministry leaders recognize the dignity of each person and refrain from behaviors or words that are disrespectful of anyone or any group.
- b. Youth ministry leaders serve all people without regard to gender, creed, national origin, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, immigration status, or political beliefs.
- c. Youth ministry leaders ensure that all persons have access to the resources, services, and opportunities they require with particular regard for persons with special needs or disabilities.

3. Accountability

- a. Youth ministry leaders are accountable to the pastor or other duly appointed representative, under the authority of the diocesan bishop.
- b. Youth ministry leaders are called to serve the faith community, carrying out their ministerial functions "...conscientiously, earnestly, and diligently" (§ 231, Code of Canon Law).
- c. Youth ministry leaders exercise responsible stewardship of resources while holding themselves to the highest standards of integrity regarding the fiscal matters placed in their trust.
- d. Youth ministry leaders, upon suspecting or learning of abuse of a minor, must notify the civil authorities, as well as church leadership responsible for this topic, in accordance with civil and ecclesial law.

4. Confidentiality

- a. Youth ministry leaders respect confidentiality, yet are not held to confidentiality in the same way as ordained ministers and licensed, certified counselors.
- b. Youth ministry leaders adhere to civil and ecclesial law concerning the reporting of neglect, abuse or when physical harm could come to the person or to a third party.
- c. Youth ministry leaders support the rights and roles of parents while ministering to the needs and concerns of their children.

5. Conduct

- a. Youth ministry leaders know that they have considerable personal power because of their ministerial position. Therefore, they will sustain respectful ministerial relationships, avoiding manipulation and other abuses of power.
- b. Youth ministry leaders maintain appropriate professional boundaries (e.g., physical, sexual, spiritual, relational, and emotional). Romantic, dating, or sexual relationships between a youth ministry leader and any youth is inappropriate and unethical.
- c. Youth ministry leaders shall exhibit the highest ethical standards and personal integrity reflective of the Gospel and will avoid even the appearance of impropriety.
- d. Youth ministry leaders may not use alcohol while supervising youth; may never use illicit substances; and, may never provide alcohol or illicit substances to youth.

6. Referrals and Intervention

- a. Youth ministry leaders know the signs of neglect and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.
- b. Youth ministry leaders know their limitations with respect to paraprofessional counseling and make appropriate referrals.

7. Parish/Diocesan Policies

- a. Youth ministry leaders know of and comply with all applicable parish, organizational and/or diocesan policies with special attention to sexual misconduct, safe environment, risk management, safety, transportation, parental permission, and medical emergency policies.

References

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- Gula, Richard, (1996), Ethics in Pastoral Ministry. New York: Paulist Press.
- National Association for Lay Ministry Standards Code of Ethics. Downloaded from the Internet on October 16, 2002 at www.nalm.org/standards.html.
- National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry's Organizational Code of Conduct. March 2000.
- NALM, NCCL, and NFCYM, (September 29, 2002). Common Competency Project Core Certification Standards and Competencies. Draft 3.

This code of ethics pertains to lay ecclesial ministers serving as youth ministry leaders. These individuals may conduct ministry under a variety of titles, including but not limited to coordinator of youth ministry, director of youth ministry, parish youth minister, and/or campus minister. Some pastoral associates, parish coordinators, and catechetical leaders may also share responsibility for youth ministry and as such may be considered "lay ecclesial ministers serving as youth ministry leaders."

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Role of Teens in Parish Catechetical Programs

(Youth Volunteers as Catechist Assistants)

It is a given that high school youth are still in their formative years in learning and practicing their faith. Therefore, it is inappropriate to give them a role as primary catechists within the parish catechetical program. The Catechist Assistant or Program Aide is a support person who is paired with the primary Catechist to help him/her perform the duties of catechesis. At the request of the Catechist, this person may help with activities, supplies, group management, attendance records, set-up and clean-up, etc.

Teens and Young Adults (under 21) that are given responsibilities to assist with youth programming such as aides:

- Need Safe Environment Training (a special training for youth)
- Cannot be used as a 2nd adult in the group/room
- While they can be used in the role of “Catechist in Training” with an adult mentor, they should never be the main catechist or bear the responsibility of leadership for a group

(The above policy on Teens and Young Adults has been crafted with the collaboration of the Safe Environment Office of the Diocese of Dallas.)

List of Ministry-Related Forms

The following form templates can be found at www.catholicdallas.org

- **Diocesan Annual Enrollment Form for Minors**

This form is recommended to be filled out annually for minors participating in on-site faith formation and ministry programs. It contains information on youth and parents as well as a medical release for any on-site emergencies. It also contains a blanket annual Audio/Video Release. It should be a standard practice to get this form completed for any new participants coming into the program throughout the year.

- **Diocesan Travel Release and Permission Form – Minors & Adult**

These two forms (Minor & Adult) are for events that take place off-site of the parish campus and contain information on the specific event, including the mode of travel. The forms contain liability and medical release/consent, which may be kept by the group leader or with the person throughout the event as well as a basic code of conduct. It is recommended to use one for each off-site event and activity. The adult form is recommended for use when adults are traveling with minors or for adult-only events with higher risk (ex: sports, out of state, etc.).

- **Diocesan YM Event Code of Conduct – Minors & Adult**

These recommended forms contain general code of conduct information on the front and space for event-specific code of conduct bullets on the back. Rather than using these as separate forms, it is recommended to build a code of conduct directly into the Travel Release Form to reduce the number of forms a parent needs to sign.

- **Incident Information Report**

This form is recommended for documenting any incidents including, but not necessarily limited to those which require disciplinary action such as vandalism or illegal activities, as well as any accidents or injuries which may occur.

- **Adult Chaperone Safe Environment Clearance Verification**

This form is used to verify S/E clearance for any adults attending events. It is usually asked for when the event is organized and sponsored by an entity other than the local parish.

- **Volunteer Adult Driver Form**

This form is recommended to be filled out annually by all volunteers who may be driving their own private vehicle to, from, or for an off-site youth ministry event. It is especially important for those who will be transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Reporting Abuse or Ethics Violations

REPORT ABUSE

If you suspect a priest or employee at your parish has engaged in sexual misconduct involving a child:

First, notify local law enforcement.

Second, notify the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services through the Texas Abuse Hotline - 1-800-252-5400 or www.txabusehotline.org.

Finally, if the allegation involves a member of the clergy, an employee, or volunteer of a parish or the Diocese, please notify the Diocese of Dallas Victims Assistance Coordinator, at 214-379-2812.

REPORT ETHICS VIOLATIONS

The Diocese of Dallas is committed to ethical behavior and accountability. To make a report regarding violations of ethical behavior, visit the secure [EthicsPoint website](#) (link found at www.cathdal.org).

Categories for reporting include: accounting/financial; confidentiality; fraud/theft; gifts/donations; harassment/inappropriate behavior; misuse of resources; workplace safety; child and youth protection; and school safety.

Additional Resources

Diocesan Office of Safe Environment & Victims Assistance

Contact this office for questions relating to:

- Diocesan Safe Environment Policies and Procedures
- The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People
- Diocesan Speakers' Database
- Information on Criminal Background Checks
- Information on Clearing and Training Volunteers
- Non-parish based organizations conducting ministry within the Diocese of Dallas
- Reporting of suspected child abuse by clergy, employees, or volunteers (See Reporting)
- Reporting of sexual misconduct by clergy, employees, or volunteers (See Reporting)

Diocesan Office of Risk Management

Contact this office through your Parish Business Manager for questions relating to:

- Chartering Commercial Transportation and Charter Bus Contracts
- Volunteer Drivers
- Accident Reports and Liability Issues

Diocesan Office of the Chancellor

Contact this office for questions relating to:

- Faculties and Affidavits for Clergy from Outside the Diocese of Dallas

Visit www.catholicdallas.org/leaders

- Common Ministry-Related Policies
- Community Calendar
- Our Services
- Resources
- More...