



M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: August 10, 2023
TO: Directors of Religious Education
Directors of Youth Ministry
CC: Very Reverend Jamie Workman, Vicar General
Very Reverend William Saunders, Episcopal Vicar for Faith Formation
Mr. Ward Jones, Chief Operating Officer
Mr. Mark Herrmann, General Counsel
FROM: Dcn. Marques Silva *Dcn. Marques*
RE: Policy Reminders

As the Diocese begins a new season of religious education and youth ministry, the *Office for the Protection of Children and Young People* (OPCYP) would like to offer a few reminders and best practices to assist you in your ministry. The following serves to update and remind you of some of the OPCYP policies that directly impact your ministries.

Volunteer Applications & Diocesan Compliance

The OPCYP electronic application has been in effect since 2019. Paper applications are not accepted by OPCYP.

This new process has significantly shortened the turn-around time for individuals to be cleared for service. With this new process, please remember to:

- **Communicate with your parish liaison concerning new volunteers.** Provide a list of volunteers to your parish liaison *before* they complete the online application. Parish Liaisons must electronically approve or decline all applications prior to the background check process beginning. The liaisons also have the instructions and appropriate codes for your volunteers to complete the process.
- **Ensure all volunteers are CLEAR before they begin their service.** Diocesan policy requires all employees and volunteers whose positions naturally work with youth or volunteers with substantial contact with minors to have successfully completed the online application and cleared the initial CDA background check before beginning service, and to attend the diocesan live and in-person safe environment training within 45 days of submitting their application.
- **Check with your Parish Liaison to ensure external speakers and volunteers are compliant and added to your parish report.** Parish Liaisons can search the entire diocese and assign to your parish other compliant individuals. Catechists, speakers, volunteers, etc., who work with your youth and who are not normally on your compliance report are to be added by the parish liaison prior to service. Speakers from outside of the Diocese should be vetted and approved through the Office of the Vicar General prior to attending the event.

Youth Ministry Participants

High School youth ministry participants are those who are rising freshman (after they have graduated their eighth-grade year) through their senior year of high school. Those individuals in high school and who are the age of majority (18 years plus one day) and prior to his or her 20th year of age, may participate in youth ministry events through the summer following his or her senior year of high school. This exception ends the first day of the Commonwealth of Virginia's college class schedule.

No high school individuals 20 years of age or older may attend in high school youth ministry or religious education events as a participant.

All graduated high school youth or individuals 18 years or older may not serve as an adult volunteer in the ministries at the parish they were involved in youth ministry until they have graduated or are 21 years of age – whichever comes first.

Middle School and High School Events

Middle school and high school youth should not participate in mixed events due to reasons of maturity and experience. This does not preclude high schoolers being used to assist in middle school events, such as assisting small group leaders, serving as high school helpers, etc. However, per diocesan policy, they may not have supervisory authority over other youth except for those official and Diocesan-recognized programs that are designed to foster leadership as an inherent part of the program, e.g., scouting programs.

College and High School Mixed Events

All events located at or on diocesan locations or property, regardless of the organizer, in which high school participants are commingling with or being supervised by college students are required to follow diocesan policy and ensure that all individuals 18 years of age and older are fully compliant. (Exception is made for those who are 18 or 19 years of age and still enrolled in high school)

Safe Environment Training

The Diocese requires all minors involved in youth ministry and religious education to participate in the yearly safe environment training. A new program has been added to allow additional variation and assistance to parishes and schools alike. For youth in grades K-8, parishes may choose either *Formation in Christian Chastity* or *Circles of Grace* (new program). The high school programs include: *Called to Protect*, *Tricked* or *Circles of Grace*. Please remember:

- **Presenting the safe environment training must be provided during regularly scheduled religious education or youth ministry.** *Best Practice: For high school ministry, use the programs offered on a rotating basis. Each program addresses safe environments from different perspectives and relate to different environments.*
- **The presentation may not run in the background.** The youth must be focused on this program. It may not be presented during dinner or other activities.
- **The make-up session also must be provided during regularly scheduled religious education or youth ministry.**
- **All safe-environment training and the make-up sessions must be completed prior to last Friday in December.**

Cell Phones

The *Code of Conduct* in Section K. paragraph 9, states, “*Use of cell phones is not permitted during youth events.*” Youth may not have on their person or be using their cell phones during catechetical and/or youth ministry events whether in our diocese or outside of it, regardless of the particular policies of an event in another diocese. No exceptions will be made except for international events and waivers will be given in writing. To assist you, consider:

- **Reminding parents there is no need for cell/smart phones during religious education or youth events.**
- **Provide a box for the youth to turn-in and retrieve their cells phones before and after the event.** Please remember that these are valuable objects and should be supervised by an adult.

Best Practice: Many parishes have the youth put their name on masking tape and attach it to the phone prior to placing it in the cell phone box.

External Diocesan Events

There are youth ministry and catechetical opportunities and activities that are available outside of the Diocese of Arlington i.e., Mount 2000, Catholic Heart Workcamp, LifeTeen camps, SOME (So Others May Eat), etc. Please remember:

- **Adults and participants are required to follow and adhere to the more stringent of the child protection policies.** If there is a difference between the Diocese of Arlington policies and those of the local diocesan jurisdiction in which the event takes place, the more stringent of policies take precedence. Additionally, a number of the camps are willing to work with the Diocese of Arlington when our Code of Conduct is more stringent than theirs. Examples include:
 - **Diocese of Richmond:** All individuals 18 years of age or older, regardless of their academic year, are adults and may not participate in youth events as youth or sleep in locations with youth. *Best Practice: Since it is also not prudent to have these individuals sleep with the adult volunteers, consider a room set aside for high school young adults. The Diocese of Richmond regularly makes this accommodation.*
 - **Archdiocese of Baltimore (ADB):** The Archdiocese of Baltimore has the same policy regarding 18-year-olds as it is stated in the Diocese of Arlington's Code of Conduct. ADB *does* require that our Office of Child Protection & Safety certifies with its office seal that the chaperones and volunteers participating have been cleared through a background check and are compliant with our diocesan standards.
 - **Archdiocese of Washington (ADW):** All adults must complete the ADW background check *AND* ADW's Virtus training (Arlington's training does not transfer) prior to participating or chaperoning a youth event that interacts with ADW parishes or youth (March for Life events are exempt).

DYMs and DREs are responsible for investigating and knowing the policies of the jurisdiction prior to the event.

- **Diocesan certification of compliance.** All non-diocesan events (i.e., non-Diocese of Arlington workcamps, Steubenville Youth Conferences, LifeTeen, etc.) that allow other adults who are not Diocese of Arlington volunteers or employees to have supervision over Arlington Diocese youth may not do so without the event organizers receiving certification from those adults' Diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Young People that they have successfully completed their home diocese's background check and safe environment training. *Best Practice: Steubenville Youth Conferences require a Diocesan seal for every adult volunteer and chaperone that attends its youth conference(s). Parish seals are not accepted.*

Thank you for all the work you do with our diocesan youth. OPCYP is happy assist you in answering questions or clarifying policies related to the Office of Child Protection.