

SAFE ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR
ARCHDIOCESAN CHURCHES

Office for the Protection of Children and Youth
(OPCY)



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INTRODUCTION:

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), through the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, directs all Dioceses/eparchies to maintain “safe environment” programs, which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles.

The USCCB Charter is available for further reading on their website:

[Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth](#)

DEFINITIONS:

Leadership: At churches, leadership includes those persons authorized to make and enforce decisions. For example: Pastor, Business Administrator

Designee: A person selected or designated by the Pastor to carry out a duty or role.

VIRTUS: Online training and tracking platform used for Safe Environment Credentialing of adult employees and adult volunteers. Safe Environment credentialing includes Background check, Code of Conduct and training.

McDowell Agency: A licensed, private investigative firm specializing in background checks and pre-employment screening services. Background checks for church employees and volunteers are conducted by the McDowell Agency.

OPCY Overview

The Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis has delegated the work of safe environment to the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth (OPCY).

OPCY staff includes Program Liaisons who provide one-on-one training, guidance and on-going support to churches for safe environment requirements. Program Liaisons also conduct annual audits as mandated by the USCCB, and help to facilitate USCCB on-site audits.

The Office of Ministerial Standards and Safe Environment (OMSSE) oversees OPCY. The Director of OMSSE reports to the Archbishop.

For more information on safe environment, including staff and contact information, policies, resources and other Archdiocesan offices, please visit our websites:

Archdiocesan Website: www.archspm.org
Archdiocesan Safe Environment Website: www.safe-environment.archspm.org

Safe Environment Coordinators

The Archdiocese requires each church to appoint a Safe Environment Coordinator (SEC) to manage safe environment requirements. An overview of SEC job duties is found in the appendix of this document.

Business Administrators, HR Managers, Directors of Religious Education (DRE), administrative assistants, or other staff members may be appointed for this position. When considering this appointment, church leadership should ensure the person assigned as the SEC has the following:

- Sufficient time in the workweek to complete required responsibilities
- Aptitude to learn and effectively use online software systems
- Competence to comprehend, manage and process detailed information
- Excellent organizational skills
- Ability to preserve confidential information
- Sufficient judgment to escalate concerns to leadership

OPCY Program Liaisons offer training, guidance and support for SECs, but do not directly manage safe environment programs at churches.

CHURCH STANDARDS

Standard 1 ESSENTIAL 3 (E3): The church shall facilitate a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults by requiring all employees, as well as volunteers who have regular or unsupervised interaction with minors or vulnerable adults, to be E3 qualified (background check, Code of Conduct, safe environment training).

- A Safe Environment Coordinator (SEC) shall be appointed by the Pastor or designee.
- Pastor or designee notifies OPCY Program Liaison of the SEC name, position, phone, and email.
- OPCY Program Liaison is promptly notified of any SEC furlough, leave-of-absence, resignation, termination or appointment of new SEC.
- Pastor or designee ensures that SEC and other staff do not share login or password information for any safe environment platform (VIRTUS, McDowell) for any reason.
 - If Pastor or designee becomes aware of a sharing violation, Pastor or designee notifies Program Liaison to mitigate account breach.
- SECs shall complete required New SEC Training with their Program Liaison within 30 days of appointment and shall participate in ongoing training and communication, including:
 - Timely review of email notices and training resources.
 - Participation in scheduled meetings with their Program Liaison.
- Leadership and SEC shall use an agreed upon onboarding process to ensure that all new employees and volunteers complete E3 safe environment credentialing prior to beginning work or ministry.
- Leadership and SEC shall develop and maintain a process to monitor E3 safe environment credentialing of employees and volunteers throughout the program year and ensure compliance at all times.
- Leadership and SEC shall develop and maintain a process to identify and to take corrective action when employees or volunteers fail to maintain E3 compliance.
- Archdiocesan [Policy 102](#) – *Background Check – Model Policy for Schools & Parishes* shall be considered when reviewing employee and volunteer background checks.
- A records retention schedule shall be in place in accordance with archdiocesan [Policy 204](#) – *Records Retention Policy*.

Standard 2: PERSONAL SAFETY INSTRUCTION: Children in Kindergarten through Grade 12 shall receive age-appropriate Personal Safety Lessons (PSL).

- SEC is responsible for sharing current program year PSL guidelines (provided by OPCY) with the Director of Religious Education (DRE) or coordinators of Faith Formation and sacramental preparation. SEC refers staff to the OPCY Program Liaison as needed.
- OPCY-approved PSL curriculum must be used.
- PSL must be scheduled and communicated to all registered families.
- Catechists must receive orientation regarding PSL prior to the teaching of the lessons.
- PSL attendance must be recorded and reported to the SEC for audit purposes.
- SEC shall coordinate with DRE (or whomever manages Faith Formation and sacramental preparation) to follow PSL guidelines for families who conscientiously object to instructional content (Opt-Outs).
- Absenteeism and opt-outs combined are not to exceed 10% on an annual basis.

Standard 3: ANNUAL REPORTING / AUDITS: The church complies with all audit requests from OPCY and USCCB.

- Records shall be maintained for each program year so that required data may be collected for mandated audits:
 - Adult employee and volunteer E3 records
 - Personal Safety Lessons curriculum used
 - PSL attendance

- Reported data for adult employees and volunteers should correspond with VIRTUS records

- E3 records for the following groups are readily available upon request:
 - Minor employees and volunteers
 - Pastoral Ministry volunteers
 - Volunteer Leadership (Trustees, Parish Council, Finance Council)

Standard 4 COMMUNICATIONS: Safe Environment requirements are effectively communicated.

- The church website and bulletin shall contain the name and contact information of the Safe Environment Coordinator.
- The church website shall contain information regarding Archdiocesan Safe Environment requirements, reporting abuse, and the Victim Assistance Hotline phone number. It is strongly recommended that the church website include a link directly to the Archdiocesan Safe Environment website.
- The church bulletin shall include information occasionally throughout the year regarding Archdiocesan Safe Environment requirements, reporting abuse, and the Victim Assistance Hotline phone number.
- Employees and volunteers are advised of the safe environment credentialing and re-credentialing requirements and the consequences of failing to meet those requirements.
- The church communicates to all staff and volunteer ministries that events and activities involving minors must be reviewed and approved by leadership to ensure safe environment requirements are met.
- Employees and volunteers are reminded that they must comply with their applicable Code of Conduct and Archdiocesan policies.
- Employees are provided church email accounts, and must use them for all communications on behalf of the church.
- The church maintains an acceptable use of social media policy for electronic devices for employees, volunteers, and minors, if applicable.
- The church consults with their insurance carrier regarding a *Consent and Release Form* for the use of social media or visual likeness.
- Safe Environment brochures and posters are displayed publicly:
 - “Victim/Survivor Assistance” brochures
 - “How to Report Abuse and Neglect” brochures
 - USCCB “Promise to Protect” posters

Standard 5 PLANNING and PREPARATION: Activities and events are planned in advance to ensure proper safety practices.

- The church shall plan activities and events in accordance with safe environment requirements, and consult with OPCY Program Liaison as needed.
- Church shall consult with their insurance carrier regarding such things as consent and permission forms, adult/youth ratio requirements, and transportation to and from events/activities.
- All chaperones and emergency substitutes must be E3-qualified prior to service, and must be apprised of their responsibility regarding supervision.
- Guest procedures must be planned, written, and communicated to staff and volunteers. Some examples include using sign-in sheets and name tags, and escorting guests to/from the event space.

Appendix

Safe Environment Coordinator (Church and School) — Job Duties Overview

This document outlines the most important duties you must complete to ensure your parish or school is in compliance with Safe Environment requirements at all times. Please contact your OPCY Program Liaison for more details.

Essential 3 (E3) Credentialing

Ensure that each of the following groups complete E3 credentialing and re-credential every three (3) years:

- All adult employees
- Adult volunteers who interact with minors
- Minor employees and volunteers (under age 18) who volunteer with other minors or interact with vulnerable adults
- Pastoral ministry volunteers who interact with vulnerable adults
- Parish leadership volunteers (Trustees, Parish Council, Finance Council)

Curriculum for Minors: Personal Safety Lessons (PSL)

Work with your site's Faith Formation / Religious Education team to ensure that all children enrolled in your parish's or school's Faith Formation / Religious Education program are receiving personal safety lessons.

- Be aware of the PSL curriculum your location uses.
- Ensure that records are kept on enrollment and attendance.

Record Keeping

Maintain an orderly, accurate system of electronic and paper records throughout the year, which can be easily viewed upon request of an auditor. This data will be reported annually to the Archdiocese through a required audit process.

- Monitor and maintain records on the VIRTUS website. Manually add records if background checks and/or *Codes of Conduct* were completed outside of VIRTUS.
- Monitor the McDowell Agency website for background check processing and results.
- Permanently maintain background check results, as well as any paper forms used for *Codes of Conduct*, release of information, volunteer applications, and other necessary paperwork. These records should never be destroyed.

Audits and Reporting of Information

- Complete and submit an annual audit report (Spring Audit Report—SAR) upon request of the Archdiocese within the required time period.
- Complete and return other reports or documentation upon the request of the Archdiocese and/or the USCCB.

Communication and Support

- Serve as the primary contact between your employees/volunteers and your Archdiocesan OPCY Program Liaison.
- Check with your OPCY Program Liaison when questions arise involving activities with minors or vulnerable adults, to ensure your site is following Safe Environment best practices.
- Be a resource to your staff and volunteers: This includes helping to navigate VIRTUS, following up with E3 and PSL requirements, and being the first point of assistance to resolve problems.
- Communicate regularly with your payroll office to ensure your list of employees is accurate.
- Communicate regularly with all ministry groups at your site to ensure your list of volunteers is accurate.
- Communicate regularly with your site's Faith Formation / Religious Education team regarding PSL (see above).
- Effectively publicize Safe Environment information on your parish/school website and in bulletins, newsletters, etc.:
 - SEC contact information
 - E3 requirements
 - Victim Assistance Hotline phone number and How to Report Suspected Abuse
- Ensure the prominent display of "*Promise to Protect*" posters and the availability of "*Victim/Survivor Assistance*" and "*How to Report Suspected Abuse and Neglect*" brochures in gathering places. Order/print materials as needed.