

Pastor's Pen: Some Changes in Policies

A couple weeks back, the priests of the diocese gathered together for the yearly Priest Institute. In it, the bishop and the diocese introduced some changes which need to take place. One of the major ones is concerning volunteers in the parish.

For almost 18 years now, any volunteer who work with minors and all personnel have had to do what is called "Protecting God's Children" protocols, cleared of being on the National Sexual Offender Registry, complete the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry, and have read and given consent to Code of Pastoral Conduct. These would be considered level two. Priests, because we have to do more, are level one. We have done this to be as sure as able that anyone who works with or volunteers with our youth are NOT those who prey on our youth. We do this also so that any of us know what to look for (warning signs) for potential abuse. For those who work with or volunteer with, or volunteer aside children, this is still the case. If you fit into this category and have not done this yet, I urge you to go to Virtus.org by the end of this month.

Effective July 1, 2021, by mandate of the bishop, all parents who have children in our school will be considered level 2 and will have needed to complete the above.

WHAT IS CHANGING?

A new level, level 3, has been mandated by Bishop McKnight for the same reasons as stated above. It is to further educate and protect. A distinction is made, though, for those who work with or volunteer with or volunteer alongside youth from those who volunteer in a place where youth happen to be.

All who volunteer for any ministry for more than once a year (this includes fundraisers sponsored by the parish) must:

- a) Complete the "Protecting God's Children" training (can be done online),
- b) Complete a check with the National Sex Offender Registry (also online), and
- c) Read and consent to the Code of Pastoral Conduct.

All of this, too, can be done at Virtus.org. Those who would fall into this category are those who do ministries at Mass (Readers, Coordinators, Communion Ministers, Cantors, Musicians, Sacristans, Ushers, Greeters) who will be in a place where there are children but are not working with or mentoring children. Those who are would be in the above category. Included also would be those who prepare our funeral luncheons. Also included would be anyone who serves on a parish committee. If you have not done this, I urge you to do so by the end of the month.

It makes sense to do this in our parishes as our youth volunteer in many aspects of parish life. Furthermore, in the interest of training our youth to merely take volunteer roles but to exercise leadership, we are seeing our youth more interspersed with adults. This is a very good thing. Because we are expanding what our youth are able to do taking this precaution is necessary.

I want all of us to understand that we are not doing this because we do not trust you or others, but because it is yet another way for us to look out for the good of others, especially any youth who might well be suffering in silence abuse in or outside of the home. It is about looking out for each other. It is not about mistrust or sowing an atmosphere of paranoia.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at the parish. I thank you for your understanding and cooperation in this matter.