

**POLICY AND PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES FOR THE DIOCESE OF PALM BEACH  
RELATING TO  
PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Diocese of Palm Beach is committed to the well being of those who are served by the Church. The People of God have a right to be able to trust those who minister to them in God's name. The violation of this trust through any sexual abuse by Church Personnel is a source of great pain, for those involved and for the entire Church community.

The Diocese of Palm Beach will make every reasonable effort to prevent sexual abuse, and to respond promptly to all allegations of abuse where there is a reasonable belief that abuse has occurred. This Diocese also will comply with all obligations of civil and canon law. The Diocese will promote healing where it is needed, provide education, training and guidance when it is appropriate, and endeavor to prevent any sexual abuse of minors with firm justice and mercy towards all. No person, including clergy, who has been determined to have engaged in sexual abuse of a minor, will be allowed to remain in active ministry. Such actions violate Christian principles and are outside the scope of duties and employment of all Church Personnel. The diocese will not tolerate such behavior. This policy applies to all diocesan agencies, and all parishes and parish activities within the diocese.

Care will always be taken to protect the rights all parties involved, particularly those of the person claiming to have been sexually abused and the person against whom the charge has been made. When the accusation has been proved to be unfounded, every step possible will be taken to restore the good name of the person falsely accused.

**II. DEFINITIONS**

For the purposes of this policy:

- (A) **ALLEGATION**: A statement or accusation of sexual abuse.
- (B) **CHILD OR MINOR**: A person less than eighteen (18) years of age.
- (C) **VULNERABLE ADULT**: Such persons as so defined in Chapter 415, Florida Statutes. A copy of the statutory definitions is attached.
- (D) **DCF**: The Florida Department of Children and Families.
- (E) **CHURCH PERSONNEL**: For purposes of this policy only, Church Personnel shall include any person who is employed by, or engaged in ministry, or providing service, either directly or indirectly, for the diocese, an agency controlled by the Diocese, or a parish. Church Personnel shall include, but not be limited to, priests, deacons, religious, employees, and any volunteer involved in any diocesan or parish activity. "Personnel" as defined herein, has reference only to the applicability of this policy, and is not indicative of any agency or employment relationship between a diocese and the party whose compliance with this policy is sought.
- (F) **SEXUAL ABUSE**: Sexual abuse means any act constituting sexual abuse as defined in Chapter 39 and Chapter 415, Florida Statutes, whether perpetuated against a child or vulnerable adult as defined herein. A copy of the applicable provisions of the statutes is attached to the end of this policy.

**(G) DIOCESAN CONTACT PERSON:** Person named by diocesan bishop who can be contacted at: Ms. Terry Fretterd (561) 801-0999

**(H) PROMOTER OF JUSTICE:** The prosecuting attorney in Church courts.

### **III. DISCLOSURE & REPORTING**

#### **A. Summary and Purpose**

This policy is intended to establish requirements and procedures in an effort to prevent sexual abuse by Church Personnel and the resulting harm to the victims and the Church community, and to provide guidance on how to respond to allegations of sexual abuse. All Church Personnel must comply with applicable laws regarding incidents of actual or suspected sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults and with these procedural guidelines.

#### **B. Distribution of Policy**

A copy of this policy shall be distributed to all diocesan agencies and parishes.

#### **C. Obligation to Report Abuse**

- (1)** All Church Personnel who know, or have reasonable cause to suspect, that a child or vulnerable adult has been a victim of sexual abuse, shall immediately make any report required by law directly to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Any mandatory report may be made by calling the toll free statewide abuse or neglect registry at 1-800-96ABUSE, or by calling the local DCF office responsible for receiving such reports. Any verbal report to DCF, which is required by law to be confirmed in writing, shall be confirmed in writing to the local DCF office within forty-eight (48) hours of making the verbal report. The statutory clergy confidentiality privilege, as provided in Section 39.204, F.S., and as described in Section 90.505, F.S., shall apply to all reporting required under this paragraph.
- (2)** All allegations of sexual abuse by Church Personnel or on church premises shall be reported promptly to the Diocesan Contact Person or the Chancellor's Office. The Diocesan Contact Person/Chancellor shall immediately notify the Diocese Attorney who will in turn notify the local State Attorney. Procedures for making a complaint will be readily available in printed form.
- (3)** Any report made to DCF should contain, when possible, the names and addresses of the child or vulnerable adult and of the child or vulnerable adult's parent, guardian, or other adult having custody and control of the child or vulnerable adult, the child or vulnerable adult's age, the nature and possible extent of the child or vulnerable adult's injuries, and any other information that the person reporting believes may be helpful with respect to the investigation of the alleged abuse, and the identity of the alleged perpetrator.
- (4)** If the complaint is not received from or does not involve the parent or guardian of the child or vulnerable adult, arrangements should be made to notify immediately the parent or guardian. Notice should not be given to the parent or guardian if he or she is the person against whom the complaint is made. Appropriate pastoral concern and support shall also be shown to all parties involved, including the family. All information relating to a child or vulnerable adult incident, in which a complaint is made against Church Personnel, shall be assembled and retained in a written form in a confidential manner.

- (5) This Diocese will cooperate with public authorities about reporting in cases when the person alleged to have been abused is no longer a minor. In every instance, the diocese will notify the Diocesan Attorney who will in turn notify the local State Attorney. In addition, the Diocese will advise and support a person's right to make a report to public authorities.
- (6) In cases of child sexual abuse, the Diocese will not enter into confidentiality agreements except for grave or substantial reasons brought forward by the victim or survivor and noted in the text of the agreement.

#### **IV. PASTORAL RESPONSE & REVIEW BOARD**

##### **A. Pastoral Commitment**

When an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by any Church Personnel is received, a preliminary investigation in harmony with canon law will be initiated and conducted promptly and objectively. The accused will be encouraged to retain the assistance of civil and canonical counsel and will be promptly notified of the preliminary findings of the investigation. If a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by Church Personnel is made, the alleged offender will be temporarily relieved of any ecclesiastical ministry or function, pending an investigation in harmony with canon law which will promptly commence. The diocese will exercise care not to interfere with any investigation by law enforcement. When there is sufficient evidence that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith shall be notified.

##### **B. Assistance Coordinator**

The Diocese of Palm Beach will designate a competent assistance coordinator to aid in the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused by Church Personnel when they were minors or vulnerable adults. This assistance coordinator also will serve as the Diocesan Contact person in cases of sexual abuse, unless a different contact person is appointed.

##### **C. Review Board**

###### **1. Membership**

To assist the diocesan bishop in his work, this diocese will have a Review Board that will function as a confidential consultative body established by the diocesan bishop, which will be composed of at least five persons of outstanding integrity and good judgment. The majority of the Review Board members will be laypersons who are not in the employ of the diocese; but at least one member will be a priest who is an experienced and respected pastor of the diocese. At least one member should have particular expertise in the treatment of the sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults. The members will be appointed for a term of five years, which can be renewed. It is desirable that the Promoter of Justice and the Diocesan Attorney participate in the meetings of the Review Board.

###### **2. Functions**

The functions of this Review Board include:

- a. Advising the diocesan bishop; 1) in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults; and, 2) in his determination of suitability for ministry;

- b. Reviewing diocesan policies for dealing with sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, offering advice on all aspects of these cases, whether retrospectively or prospectively.
- c. In order to respond effectively to allegations of sexual abuse against Church Personnel, the bishop may appoint individuals to investigate the allegations, which individuals may be members of the Review Board. The results of any investigation must be provided to the Review Board.

### **3. Procedures**

- a. The Diocese of Palm Beach shall develop its own Review Board procedures for implementing this policy.
- b. The Review Board or its designee shall report to the bishop regarding the allegation(s). At the bishop's request, the Review Board or its designee and the diocesan attorney shall meet with the bishop to respond to any questions he may have, or provide additional information desired by him. All information received by the Review Board shall be considered confidential and shall not be revealed by any member of the Review Board, except to the diocesan attorney, other members of the Review Board, and the bishop, unless compelled by law.
- c. If the allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is made against a bishop, the response process outlined herein shall be fully utilized with the following modification: where the Policy and Procedural Guidelines refer to the diocesan bishop, his role and function under these guidelines shall be assumed by the Metropolitan Archbishop or, should there be no Metropolitan Archbishop, by the senior suffragan bishop of the province. If an allegation is made against the Metropolitan Archbishop, then the role and function of the diocesan bishop under these guidelines shall be assumed by the senior suffragan bishop of the province. The Apostolic Nuncio shall also be notified of the allegation. In cases of financial demands for settlements involving allegations of any sexual misconduct with a minor by a bishop, the Metropolitan Archbishop will be informed. The senior suffragan bishop will be informed when such a demand has been made regarding the Metropolitan.

### **D. Removing Church Personnel From Ministry**

Nothing in this section shall be construed to preclude the bishop from removing Church Personnel from ministry upon receipt of an allegation, either pending the Review Board's completion of its proceedings, or after, even if the accused is adjudicated not guilty or if criminal charges are not brought.

### **E. Communications Policy**

The Diocese of Palm Beach will develop a communications policy that reflects a commitment to transparency and openness. Within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved, this diocese will deal as openly as possible with members of the community. This is especially so with regard to assisting and supporting parish communities directly affected by ministerial misconduct involving minors.

## **F. Safe Environment Programs**

Dioceses will establish "safe environment" programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses will make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.

## **V. ABUSE BY PRIEST OR DEACON**

### **A. Clinical Evaluation**

If the credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult involves a priest or deacon, the diocesan bishop will ask him to undergo appropriate medical and psychological evaluation and intervention. The alleged offender may be requested to seek, and may be urged voluntarily to comply with, an appropriate medical and psychological evaluation at a facility mutually acceptable to the diocese and to the accused.

### **B. Response to Admitted or Established Abuse**

When sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or is established after an appropriate investigation in accord with canon law, the following will pertain:

1. Diocesan policy will provide that for even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor—past, present, or future—the offending priest or deacon will be permanently removed from ministry. At all times, the diocesan bishop has the executive power of governance, through an administrative act, to remove an offending cleric from office, to remove or restrict his faculties, and to limit his exercise of priestly ministry. Because sexual abuse of a minor is a crime in all jurisdictions in the United States, for the sake of the common good and observing the provisions of canon law, the diocesan bishop shall exercise this power of governance to ensure that any priest who has committed even one act of sexual abuse of a minor as described above shall not continue in active ministry.
2. In every case, the processes provided for in canon law must be observed, and its various provisions be considered (cf. *Canonical Delicts Involving Sexual Misconduct and Dismissal from the Clerical State*, 1995; Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 18, 2001). These provisions may include a request by the priest or deacon for dispensation from the obligations of Holy Orders and the loss of the clerical state, or a request by his diocesan bishop for dismissal from the clerical state, even without the consent of the priest or deacon. For the sake of due process, the accused is to be encouraged to retain the assistance of civil and canonical counsel. When necessary, the diocese will supply canonical counsel to a priest.
3. If the penalty of dismissal from the clerical state has not been applied, the offender ought to lead a life of prayer and penance. He will not be permitted to celebrate Mass publicly or to administer the sacraments. He will be instructed not to wear clerical garb, or to present himself publicly as a priest.

4. The priest or deacon may at any time request a dispensation from the obligations of the clerical state. In exceptional cases, the bishop may request of the Holy Father the dismissal of the priest or deacon from the clerical state *ex officio*, even without the consent of the priest or deacon.

### **C. Transfer Requirements**

No priest or deacon who has committed an act of sexual abuse of a minor may be transferred for ministerial assignment to another diocese or religious province. Before a priest or deacon can be transferred for residence to another diocese or religious province, his bishop or religious ordinary shall forward in a confidential manner to the local bishop and religious ordinary of the proposed place of residence any and all information concerning any act of sexual abuse of a minor and any other information indicating that he has been or may be a danger to children or young people. This shall apply even if the priest or deacon will reside in the local community of an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life.

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**Administrative Note:** A copy of this policy will be filed with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops within three months of the effective date of the *Essential Norms for Diocesan Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Church Personnel* as approved by the USCCB on June 14, 2002. Copies of any eventual revisions of this policy will be filed with USCCB within three months of such modifications.

## **Citations from Florida Statutes**

### **From Section 415.102:**

(24) "Sexual abuse" means acts of a sexual nature committed in the presence of a vulnerable adult without that person's informed consent. "Sexual abuse" includes, but is not limited to, the acts defined in s.794.011(l)(h), fondling, exposure of a vulnerable adult's sexual organs, or the use of a vulnerable adult to solicit for or engage in prostitution or sexual performance. "Sexual abuse" does not include any act intended for a valid medical purpose or any act that may reasonably be construed to be normal caregiving action or appropriate display of affection.

(26) "Vulnerable adult" means a person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection is impaired due to a mental, emotional, physical, or developmental disability or dysfunctioning, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging.

### **From Section 39.01 Definitions:**

#### **Section 39.01 (63):**

(63) "Sexual abuse of a child" means one or more of the following acts:

- (a) Any penetration, however slight, of the vagina or anal opening of one person by the penis of another person, whether or not there is the emission of semen.
- (b) Any sexual contact between the genitals or anal opening of one person and the mouth or tongue of another person.
- (c) Any intrusion by one person into the genitals or anal opening of another person, including the use of any object for this purpose, except that this does not include any act intended for a valid medical purpose.
- (d) The intentional touching of the genitals or intimate parts, including the breasts, genital area, groin, inner thighs, and buttocks, or the clothing covering them, of either the child or the perpetrator, except that this does not include:
  - 1. Any act which may reasonably be construed to be a normal caregiver responsibility, any interaction with, or affection for a child; or
  - 2. Any act intended for a valid medical purpose.
- (e) The intentional masturbation of the perpetrator's genitals in the presence of a child.
- (f) The intentional exposure of the perpetrator's genitals in the presence of a child, or any other sexual act intentionally perpetrated in the presence of a child, if such exposure or sexual act is for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification, aggression, degradation, or other similar purpose.
- (g) The sexual exploitation of a child, which includes allowing, encouraging, or forcing a child to:
  - 1. Solicit for or engage in prostitution; or
  - 2. Engage in a sexual performance, as defined by chapter 827.

**39.201 Mandatory reports of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect; mandatory reports of death; central abuse hotline.--**

(1) Any person, including, but not limited to, any:

- (a) Physician, osteopathic physician, medical examiner, chiropractic physician, nurse, or hospital personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care, or treatment of persons;
- (b) Health or mental health professional other than one listed in paragraph (a);
- (c) Practitioner who relies solely on spiritual means for healing;
- (d) School teacher or other school official or personnel;
- (e) Social worker, day care center worker, or other professional child care, foster care, residential, or institutional worker;
- (f) Law enforcement officer; or
- (g) Judge, who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department in the manner prescribed in subsection (2).

**Section 39.204:**

**39.204 Abrogation of privileged communications in cases involving child abuse, abandonment, or neglect.--**The privileged quality of communication between husband and wife and between any professional person and his or her patient or client, and any other privileged communication except that between attorney and client or the privilege provided in s. 90.505, as such communication relates both to the competency of the witness and to the exclusion of confidential communications, shall not apply to any communication involving the perpetrator or alleged perpetrator in any situation involving known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect and shall not constitute grounds for failure to report as required by s. 39.201 regardless of the source of the information requiring the report, failure to cooperate with the department in its activities pursuant to this chapter, or failure to give evidence in any judicial proceeding relating to child abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

**90.505 Privilege with respect to communications to clergy.--**

(1) For the purposes of this section:

- (a) A "member of the clergy" is a priest, rabbi, practitioner of Christian Science, or minister of any religious organization or denomination usually referred to as a church, or an individual reasonably believed so to be by the person consulting him or her.
- (b) A communication between a member of the clergy and a person is "confidential" if made privately for the purpose of seeking spiritual counsel and advice from the member of the clergy in the usual course of his or her practice or discipline and not intended for further disclosure except to other persons present in furtherance of the communication.

- (2) A person has a privilege to refuse to disclose, and to prevent another from disclosing, a confidential communication by the person to a member of the clergy in his or her capacity as spiritual adviser.
- (3) The privilege may be claimed by:
  - (a) The person.
  - (b) The guardian or conservator of a person.
  - (c) The personal representative of a deceased person.
- (d) The member of the clergy, on behalf of the person. The member of the clergy's authority to do so is presumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary.