

Safe Environment Program

Diocese of Tyler

November 30, 2005

I. Introduction

God creates each human person with a sacredness that should be respected and safeguarded. The Diocese of Tyler is committed to help create a society where each human person is treated with respect and dignity. People of every age need to know that sexual abuse is not acceptable or excusable. We have a special need to protect the vulnerable, particularly children and young people. We are committed to help form children and young people to respect themselves and others and to cultivate in them healthy habits that will reduce their likelihood of ever being a victim of sexual abuse. The Diocese of Tyler is also committed to help adults be good parents/guardians. God establishes parents as the primary educators of their children. Amongst the many responsibilities of parents, the nurturing of the “safe environment” is a most important role.

In our society people of all ages have to deal with many dangers: violence, drugs, alcohol, pornography and abuse whether physical, emotional, or sexual. The Church has to address these concerns from the foundation of the Ten Commandments and the sacredness of each human person created in the image of God and redeemed through Jesus Christ. Amongst the many areas of possible danger to children and young people the threat of sexual exploitation and abuse is perhaps the greatest concern to parents, guardians, and the Church. Human sexuality is sacred and touches the very core of the person. This is why sexual abuse is such a serious crime as well as a grave sin.

In the Diocese of Tyler, I have appointed as Promoter of Justice and contact person for concerns about Ethics and Integrity of any Church Personnel the Reverend Gavin Vaverek. The Promoter of Justice can be contacted at any time by calling (903) 266-2159 or email promoter@dioceseoftyler.org. Further information on the Promoter of Justice and the Policy for Ethics and Integrity for Church Personnel can be found on the diocesan website www.dioceseoftyler.org.

II. Objective of the Safe Environment Program

The primary focus of the Diocese of Tyler’s safe environment program will be forming adults to act appropriately and to be attentive in watching out for the well-being of minors and vulnerable adults. Modeling appropriate behaviors fosters an increased sensitivity to “grooming” or other threatening behaviors. The commitments made by Church Personnel in the Code of Ethics and Integrity for Church Personnel is a public promise, and so the Code will be frequently presented to the public. Parents and guardians will receive particular attention for their own formation and to help them in forming their children. Formation of children and young people will be offered in cooperation with parents/guardians and families. Children need to know what to expect from adults and what to do if they or someone they know is threatened or harmed in any way.

III. Time Schedule

- 1) The weeks beginning the third weekend in January and the fourth weekend in September will be Safe Environment Focus Weeks. During these times, each parish, mission, and school will conduct at least one special session on safe environment using materials from the Diocese of Tyler Safe Environment Program. Typically these sessions will include distribution of some information and some activities targeted at various developmental groups. These materials will be available to all households, not just those involved with Religious Education or Catholic Schools.
- 2) Each parish, mission, and school will also join in actively participating in April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. This will provide an opportunity to foster a safe environment in the context of the broader community.

IV. Safe Environment

- 1) Awareness and sensitivity to the warning signs of potential abuse are essential to fostering a safe environment. While background checks can help prevent making a mistake of putting a convicted offender into service, we must keep in mind that few offenders are ever charged and convicted of abuse related crimes. The Diocese of Tyler is committed to cooperating with civil authorities so that the crime of abuse of minors or vulnerable adults can be dealt with in accord with civil and criminal laws.
- 2) Sexual abuse of minors typically includes significant “grooming” of victims, the family, and the community. Eliminating opportunities for “grooming” behaviors is a critical component of a safe environment program. Increasing awareness and sensitivity to possible “grooming” behaviors is necessary to create a safe environment.

V. The Primary Obligation of Parents and Their Support by the Church of Tyler

- 1) There is ongoing debate in society and in the Church about when and how to best provide children with age appropriate education concerning their sexuality. As a diocese we are committed to supporting **parents as the primary educators of their children**. As such, the household of faith is the best place to learn and come to ongoing understanding of the sacredness of their bodies, appropriate and inappropriate touches, and a Christian perspective on human sexuality.
- 2) The Diocese of Tyler will provide for the formation of all minors through the Safe Environment Program by offering all parents/guardians with the necessary resource materials. The Diocese will also assist parents and guardians in the formation of their children through formal sessions in both Catholic Schools and parish Religious Education programs. Parents and Guardians have the right to choose to personally conduct their child’s formation in connection with the Safe Environment Program. This choice shall be recorded annually on a form to be maintained by the Diocese of Tyler.

VI. Materials

- 1) Approved safe environment materials from the Diocese of Tyler will be utilized by all programs that involve minors. Materials prepared for minors will always be offered first to their parents or guardians. Materials will be developmentally appropriate. Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Tyler will utilize the standard materials from the Diocese as well as have a more detailed curriculum focusing on safe environment.
- 2) In each parish, the priest and the Parish Contact Person for Ethics and Integrity will work with the Pastoral Council to insure and encourage parents and guardians to avail themselves of all formation opportunities as well as the necessary resources. Furthermore, opportunities will be made available to young people so that they are aware of appropriate ways to insure their safety and what to do if they or a friend is in a situation that is threatening or uncomfortable.
- 3) The Diocese will also post on the website resources that all families might use in their own homes to provide more supplemental activities for their children of various ages. We will increase attention to the provisions of the Code of Ethics and our policy and guidelines for Ethics and Integrity.

VII. Conclusion

As Bishop, I ask every adult to cooperate in creating a safe environment for all God's children. Every human person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity as befits the sacred dignity of the human person. I particularly remind **priests, deacons and all Church Personnel**, whether paid or volunteer, of their obligation under the Code of Ethics to be diligent in fostering an environment where there is a sensitivity to modeling safe practices in their relationship with all God's children. I encourage parents, guardians, and other parish leaders to join in this effort.

This policy is given November 30, 2005, the Feast of St. Andrew, implementation to begin immediately with preparation and distribution of materials for January 15, 2006.

Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada, SJ

Code of Ethics and Integrity for Conduct of Church Personnel in the Diocese of Tyler

As part of our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is imperative that all Church Personnel in the Diocese consistently act with ethics and integrity. People of all ages deserve to be respected and protected in their relationships with Church Personnel. Defining healthy and safe relationships is not meant, in any way, to undermine the strength and importance of appropriate personal contact or the ministerial role. Rather, it is to assist all who fulfill the many roles that create the living Church to demonstrate their love and compassion for children and adults through sincere and genuine relationships.

All Church personnel are asked to carefully consider each statement in this Code of Ethics and Integrity and to sign their name to demonstrate their commitment to observing this Code in their life and ministry in the Diocese of Tyler.

- I. Church Personnel will exhibit the highest Christian ethical standards and personal integrity.
- II. Church Personnel will conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the discipline and teachings of the Catholic Church.
- III. Church Personnel will foster a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
- IV. Church Personnel will act professionally in all counseling, advising, or spiritual direction relationships protecting the well being of the other party at all times.
- V. Church Personnel will not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse or neglect a minor or an adult.
- VI. Church Personnel will share concerns about suspicious or inappropriate behavior with their pastor, their principal, the Promoter of Justice, or the Bishop.
- VII. Church Personnel will report any suspected abuse or neglect of a minor to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. (1-800-252-5400)**
- VIII. Church Personnel will accept their personal responsibility to protect minors and adults from all forms of abuse.
- IX. Church Personnel will guide their behaviors by this Code, civil and canon law, policies of the Diocese of Tyler, particularly the diocesan guidelines for Ethics and Integrity in Ministry.

Concerns about violations of this Code can be reported to the Promoter of Justice (903) 266-2159.

Suggestions for Parents of Minors
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Minors should be directed toward closer communication with their parents /guardians, and secondarily with other “safe” adults. Here is a list of some practical points to inform minors about:

1. Don't keep secrets from Mom and Dad or your guardians. Tell your Mom and Dad or your guardian what goes on, it is especially important if someone ever says “Don't tell your Mom or your Dad or your guardian.” Keeping a surprise secret helps to make someone happy, but keeping other secrets can be dangerous or scary.
2. The Domestic Church or household of faith is the best place to learn and come to ongoing understanding of appropriate and inappropriate touches. If someone other than your Mom or Dad or your guardian is talking to you about touches, be sure to tell your Mom and Dad or your guardian right away.
3. If someone “does something” or “says something” that makes you feel uncomfortable, afraid, or sad, tell your Mom and Dad or your guardian or another “safe adult”. There is an important difference between something you do not like (like if your Mom says you have to eat your vegetables, or that you can't play video games), as opposed to something that makes you feel bad (like when someone makes fun of you). If you aren't sure always talk to your Mom and Dad or your guardian or to another safe adult. Talk to your parents or guardian about who are “safe adults”. Besides your parents: teachers, coaches, scout leaders, or aunts and uncles might be “safe adults”.
4. Always say “thank you” for a gift, but always ask your Mom and Dad or your guardian's permission to keep the gift. If anyone gives you a gift when your parents/guardian aren't around, be sure to show it to them when you see them.
5. Your Mom and Dad or your guardian should always know if an adult is going to be with you alone. They should tell you it is ok to be alone with a particular adult before it happens. Be sure to tell your Mom and Dad or your guardian whenever an adult is with you alone.
6. If something different or unusual happens always tell your Mom and Dad or your guardian. The something different may be good, or bad or something you are not sure about.
7. If you have a friend or classmate who had something happen to them, help them talk to a “safe adult”.

8. Sneaky adults are dangerous. They look like everyone else, but you have to watch out for them. Sometimes people you know are sneaky and try to do things they should not do.
9. In a dangerous situation, run and scream. Look for some adult who is “safe” to help you like a police officer, parents with their children, and people behind the counter in a store. Say, “Help keep me safe from danger. I think someone might be out to hurt me. Call the police or my parents. Please help me.”
10. Everyone who works at the Church should always act in a very safely. This includes being very careful to respect each person. They agree to extra safe rules so that children will be extra safe. Tell you Mom and Dad or your guardian if anyone at Church ever fails to be extra safe around you.
11. If an adult wants to be your friend, you have to ask your Mom and Dad or your guardian first. Adults should be friends with adults. They should be nice to children and young people, but they should also protect them and help keep them safe. If an adult tries to be your friend and treats you as an equal tell your Mom and Dad or your guardian. Adults can genuinely like children and enjoy their company, but healthy, safe adults understand there is a difference between a child (even a teenager) and an adult.
12. Some children don’t have a Mom and Dad to talk to. Who can they go to share or talk about these important things? Maybe another Mom or Dad can help them. Or a teacher is usually a smart choice or someone in the school office, a police officer or their doctor or a minister. Adults are supposed to want to help keep you safe, not try to play you or use you.

Annual Participation Record

August 15, 2005- August 14, 2006

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It is very important that a conscious and consistent effort be made to form our young people about what constitutes a **safe environment** and how to respond if they are ever faced with a situation that threatens them or makes them uncomfortable. The Diocese of Tyler encourages all parents and guardians to take seriously this need for forming their children concerning **safe environment** issues. The diocese encourages all parents/guardians to work in a responsible manner with the diocese in the ongoing formation of their children regarding the topic of sex abuse. This record of your choice concerning participation in the **Safe Environment Program** will help insure that every parish in the diocese complies with the Charter for Protection of Minors and with the Essential Norms.

After having received the **Safe Environment Program** materials, a parent or guardian is asked to please select one of the following options so that we may have a record that as a parent/guardian you have personally been contacted, received the materials, and have chosen your plan for action in regards the safe environment formation of your child.

Select ONE of the following:

- I have received a set of materials in connection with the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Tyler and I wish to continue to work with the diocese in carrying out my primary obligation for my child.
- I have received a set of materials in connection with the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Tyler and I will personally see to the Safe Environment formation of my child.

This applies for the following children:

_____ age ____
_____ age ____
_____ age ____

Signed,

Name: _____ Relationship _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Date: _____

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Implementation **Safe Environment Program**

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- 1) A packet of materials will be given to parents/guardians and will be available to other interested parties. An “Annual Participation Record” must be filled out by a parent/guardian in each household. This form should be filled out at registration time. If there is no formal registration period for some parish programs, the form should be completed when a young person begins participation in the program. Those responsible for a program must verify that the parish has received a current year “Annual Participation Record” that covers all the minors involved in that particular program.
- 2) In addition to Catholic School and Religious Education programs, a parish may have Home School families or children not attending faith formation sessions who participate in some other aspect of parish life.
- 3) All families that come into the parish shall receive the information on the SEP and asked to complete the Annual Participation Record.
- 4) The Annual Participation Record shall be in effect until August 15 of the following year.
- 5) These forms need to be seen by the Faith Formation Leader, who will maintain a list of those children whose parents do not want them participating in SEP during class times. Care must be used that the parents/guardians decision is respected without causing undue stress on the young people.

The forms then need to be collected for the Ethics and Integrity Parish Contact Person for report to the Pastoral Council and Pastor. The forms must be sent to the diocese for acknowledgment and for record retention.