

**FROM:** James F. Gontis  
**Director of Evangelization and Catechesis**  
**TO:** Pastors and C/DREs  
**RE:** Safety Issues and Religious Education Programs  
**DATE:** August 22, 2018

The parish has a certain obligation to see that the facilities used for their youth programs are safe, that the staff has been screened and prepared for their responsibilities, and that the programs operate in a safe manner.

### **General Safety Concerns**

Review the facilities used for your program. The enclosed checklist may be adapted for your use. Review the building and your procedures for emergency evacuation, for example, fire drills.

### **Building and Grounds**

- a. Is safety equipment in good working order? (Fire alarms, fire extinguishers, etc.)
- b. Has heating and air conditioning been maintained in good order?
- c. Are the facilities, including restrooms, clean and free of mold, or other things that may cause health concerns?
- d. Are the doors and emergency exits marked and in good working order?
- e. Is the building able to be secured during classes, e.g. doors locked?
- f. Has the playground equipment been checked for safe use by children?
- g. Have classrooms for pre-school students been childproofed?

### **Youth Protection and Safe Environment**

Please make certain that copies of the required background clearances, disclosure forms, and certificates for successful completion of on-line training are on file for all of your catechetical personnel (employees and volunteers) **prior to the beginning** of the 2018-19 catechetical year. The required clearances and trainings include:

- A) Signed *Adult Unpaid Position Disclosure Statement* (Required of all catechetical personnel)
- B) *Pennsylvania State Police Check* (Required of all catechetical personnel)
- C) *Department of Human Services (DHS) Childline Check* (Required of all catechetical personnel)
- D) *FBI Background Check* (Required for catechetical personnel who either currently live out-of-state, or who have resided in the state less than last 10 years)
- E) *University of Pittsburgh Mandated Reporter Training for Child Abuse* (Required of all catechetical personnel)
- F) *Diocese of Harrisburg Youth Protection I.D. Badge* (During religious education hours and activities, all catechetical staff, whether employees or volunteers, are to wear their up-to-date Diocese of Harrisburg Youth Protection I.D. Badge, showing that they have completed the requirements of the Diocesan Youth Protection Program)

The *Diocese of Harrisburg English/Spanish Diocesan Placard* which lists the toll free PA Child Abuse Hotline number to report suspected abuse of a minor needs to be posted in a highly visible area with the parish Religious Education facility.

Anyone who has not fulfilled all that the Diocese of Harrisburg requires in terms of youth protection may **NOT** serve in any capacity in any of our catechetical programs.

### **Student Safe Environment Lessons**

Please remember that all students in grades **1, 5, & 9** **must** be taught the Safe Environment lesson for that grade during the year and that their parents must be sent the parent letter and the required safe environment resources for parents.

For these resources, please go to: <https://www.youthprotectionhbg.com/protect-children/>.

For further information, please see the Youth Protection page of the diocesan website <http://www.hbgdiocese.org/safeyouth/>.

### **Other Staff Concerns**

- a. Have all staff members been given an orientation to the program?
- b. Do the catechists know the safety procedures, such as routes and meeting places for fire drills?
- c. Has it been emphasized to all catechists that they take and keep a record of attendance for each class session?

### **Student Concerns**

- a. Do you have basic, up-to-date registration information for each child enrolled in your program?
- b. Does your registration card contain a place for parents to indicate any special medical concerns for their child, (e.g. diabetes, bee stings)?
- c. Do you have alternate contacts in case of emergency?
- d. Are there properly signed forms for any trip off property? (See RE policy on website).
- e. Have you scheduled dates to send the *Safe Environment Program* parent letters and safety sheets to parents of all 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, as well as to parents of all students new to your program regardless of grade?
- f. Do you have dates scheduled on your 2018-19 parish religious education calendar to have the *Safe Environment Program* lessons taught to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and new students in your program?

**Note:** The parent letters, safety sheets, and *Safe Environment Program* lessons can be accessed through the home page of the diocesan website. To access: click <https://www.youthprotectionhbg.com/protect-children/>

- g. Have you scheduled a **make-up date** for the Safe Environment lessons to be taught to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and new students, who were absent from the originally scheduled lesson.

### **Special Issues**

- a. Do you have a policy on weapons at the program?
- b. Do you have a policy on student threats and harassment?
- c. Do you have a general policy statement on student behavior?

A student handout with the general information can be part of the registration materials parents receive. In creating any policy, first consult the religious education policies in the *Diocese of Harrisburg C/DRE Handbook* (or on the Religious Education page of the diocesan website. <http://www.hbgdiocese.org/religious-education/>).

### **Weapons**

- a. In the event a student is discovered with a weapon, a local law enforcement agency is to be notified. The Pastor and Diocesan Director of Evangelization and Catechesis should also be notified.
- b. Student should be suspended from the program pending review of his/her situation. An alternate program may be suggested for the student, depending on the circumstances.

### **Threats**

- a. Evaluate every threat reported. If it is determined by the Pastor to be credible, the student(s) may be suspended pending review of the matter. Contact the Diocesan Director of Evangelization and Catechesis. Always err on the side of caution!
- b. Student may be required to have a professional evaluation to determine if/when he or she may return to program.
- c. Student's school may be notified, especially if the other students attend the same school, or may ride the same bus.

### **Intruder to Building**

- a. Buildings should be secure when students are present. The presence of additional parents or volunteers may provide the needed security in hallways during classes. Just as catechists, these volunteers must fulfill the diocesan youth protection requirements prior to beginning their service in the catechetical program, e.g. background checks, *University of Pittsburgh on-line Mandated Reporter Training*, signed *Diocesan Employee/Volunteer Information and Disclosure Statement*, wearing diocesan youth protection I.D. badges during catechetical sessions.
- b. If there is an intruder to the building and/or grounds and he/she is believed to be armed, or with hostile intent, police should be called immediately! If there is a question about why someone is present, an adult must immediately determine this and take appropriate steps.
- c. C/DRE's should be conscious of the situations of families and the possibility of a "non-custodial parent" seeking to contact or secure a child. If a parent or guardian with such a concern approaches you, contact the Pastor and the Diocesan Director of Evangelization and Catechesis. We will ask for proper court documentation, obtain a legal opinion where it may be needed, and advise you how to respond to this situation.

In all things, consider what you would want another thoughtful and responsible adult to do if he or she were going to take responsibility for your child.

Thank you!