

# Diocese of Rapid City

## Keeping God's Children Safe

A Safe Environment Newsletter

Autumn  
2016  
Volume 4  
Issue 1

Through the Safe Environment Newsletters this year, we will review the Code of Conduct of the Diocese of Rapid City (revised in 2013). Our first issue will cover brief background information and the sections of: preamble, responsibility, pastoral standards, and confidentiality.

**BACKGROUND:** The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, is a comprehensive set of procedures established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in June 2002 (revised in 2005 and 2011) for addressing possible violations of ministerial trust. The Charter also includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability, and prevention of future acts of abuse. Article VI of the Charter document requires all of the dioceses to publish "standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy and for other paid personnel and volunteers of the Church in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people."<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the Code of Conduct for the Diocese of Rapid City is to develop and implement uniform guidelines for appropriate behavior. This Code of Conduct provides a basic structure for identifying limits of behavior in certain situations. The Rapid City Diocese is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for our children, young people, and vulnerable adults. All clergy, employees, and volunteers with youth or vulnerable adults are viewed as being in pastoral relationships. Any individual we minister to who is compromised by age, health, instability (emotional, social, or spiritual), is vulnerable and must be treated with compassion; at some time, it may be any one of us.

### 1.0 PREAMBLE

Priests, deacons, lay employees and volunteers in our diocese, parishes, religious communities and institutes, schools, and other organizations must uphold Christian values and maintain codes of conduct (a set of standards for behavior in pastoral situations).

The Code of Conduct provides standards for us to use in our pastoral relationships with other individuals and groups. As Catholics we are called to respect each life and the dignity of every person. While the standards in the code guide our actions in meeting the diocesan compliance, we are called to further the Gospel message. Our call extends beyond our own home, our own parish, our own diocese, to that of our Church—we represent Christ at all times in every place.

### 2. RESPONSIBILITY

The church document "Familiaris Consortio" #26 validates the necessity of treating children and youth with respect, something that is profoundly missing when one is sexually abused. The title is The Rights of Children: "Special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. This is true for every child, but it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more it is in need of everything, when it is sick, suffering or handicapped."<sup>2</sup>

The above quote beautifully expresses how children are to be treated. When one replaces the word 'children' with 'person,' we then realize how we are to treat each person with dignity and respect—so they may experience the loving face of God through our actions. This also holds true when we respond to those individuals who have been hurt, or are going through the process of healing. We come to realize that it is not just protection from harm, but more so to create a safe environment for all to heal, thrive and be all that God created us to be!

Our world extends beyond the physical parish boundaries. Wherever we go we are still called to act and respond as Church. We represent Christ to each person we encounter. When we conduct ourselves appropriately in public and in private, we inspire and motivate other persons to behave in the same way. If persons behave inappropriately, they cause harm to others, scandalize them, and undermine their faith. Each must always be aware of the responsibilities

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#### USCCB Office of Child and Youth Protection

[http://www.usccb.org/  
issues-and-action/child-  
and-youth-protection/  
index.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/index.cfm)

#### Diocese of Rapid City Safe Environment

[http://  
www.rapidcitydiocese.or  
g/safe-environment/](http://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/safe-environment/)

**"Let the children  
come to me, do  
not hinder  
them; for to  
such belongs  
the Kingdom of  
heaven."**

**- Matthew 19:14**

that accompany their work. They must also realize that God's goodness and grace supports them in their ministry. Responsibility for adherence to this Code of Conduct rests with the individual. Individuals who disregard this Code of Conduct will be subject to remedial action.

### **3.0 PASTORAL STANDARDS**

*The Magisterial Teachings also recognizes the right of all people to be treated with respect and the harm done in the loss of this right. "We must provide acceptance, love, esteem, emotional, and spiritual concern for every child that comes into this world" Familiaris Consortio #26.<sup>2</sup>*

Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors include priests, deacons, lay employees and volunteers who provide pastoral, spiritual and/or therapeutic counseling services to individuals, families and other groups.

The standards set forth in this section of the Code of Conduct are in place to help protect both parties in a pastoral relationship. We must be aware of our own pastoral competence when assisting another, and refer the person to other qualified persons when needed. Our relationships with youth and vulnerable adults need to be centered on the Catholic Church's teachings and giving service to others, rather than fulfilling our own individual needs. Aware of our responsibilities to others, we constantly need to be aware of unhealthy and dangerous situations. We should presume that the potential for exploitation or harm exists in such intimate relationships, and must establish and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries in the interaction and in the environment. In the interaction, the boundaries include appropriate language, time of ministry, and any physical contact that may be misconstrued. Environmental boundaries include ministering in public areas (not in isolated areas) that do not confuse the nature of the relationship.

### **3.1 CONFIDENTIALITY**

*All efforts to provide for the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of a child will allow God's gifts to be available to enrich the whole Church and the wider world.<sup>2</sup>*

Information disclosed during the course of counseling, advising or spiritual direction is personal and is to be held in the strictest confidence possible. One should discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations with each person in counseling. This would also include a minor making a disclosure about being abused. The Diocese of Rapid City requires all personnel of the diocese to comply with all applicable civil laws with respect to the reporting to civil authorities of all allegations of sexual abuse of minors, and to fully cooperate in their investigation (Sexual Misconduct Policy, section 13.0).

Information obtained in sessions will be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law. If there is clear and imminent danger to the client or to others, the counselor/director may disclose only the information necessary to protect the parties affected and to prevent harm. Before the disclosure is made, if feasible, inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.

While counseling a minor, if one discovers that there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor, and that communication of confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is essential to the minor's health and well-being, the pastoral counselor or spiritual director should attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure. If consent is not given, disclose only the information necessary to protect the health and well-being of the minor. Consultation with appropriate church supervisory personnel is required before disclosure.

**Please note: The seal of confession is absolute. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure – even indirect disclosure – of information received through the sacrament of Reconciliation.**

*Through scripture and Catholic teachings we are all called to protect the life and dignity of all human persons. Preventing child abuse is a necessary response to what we are called to do as Church, God's Church.<sup>2</sup>*

### **FOOTNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People; USCCB.* <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/Charter-for-the-Protection-of-Children-and-Young-People-revised-2011.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>*Magisterial Teachings on the Protection of God's Children; Martin, C.* <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/upload/magisterial-teachings-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

*Code of Conduct of the Diocese of Rapid City.* <http://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/safe-environment/policy-documents/>

*From Safe Environments to Faith Environments; Heidt Kozisek, Dr. Elizabeth A.* <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/from-safe-environments-to-faith-environments.cfm>