Diocese of Oakland

A POLICY OF EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR MINISTRY TO MINORS FOR THE DIOCESE OF OAKLAND
JUNE 1, 2004

PREAMBLE

As leaders in the Church founded by Christ, priests, deacons and lay ministers within our parishes and institutions must always seek to uphold Christian values and conduct. In addition to following the Gospel and its mandates, these individuals will want to act properly at all times in the light of contemporary society and its needs. This Policy does not presume to provide answers to all the ethical questions facing Church leaders. What it does establish is a set of general guidelines and boundaries when ministering to minors. Further guidance and advice can be sought from the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oakland as needed. Many items mentioned in this document are applicable to ministry with adults, but in this Policy we are addressing explicitly proper contact with persons under 18 years of age.

The following Policy is applicable to all persons employed by or volunteering in any of the parishes and institutions of the Diocese of Oakland. So that it is clear who must be aware of the contents of this document, the addressees include, but are not limited to: priests, religious (men and women), deacons, pastoral coordinators, school/program administrators, teachers, catechists, youth ministers, support staff, custodial staff, coaches, school program volunteers, seminarians serving internships and lay theology students.

This Policy has been developed to help create a safe, appropriate and Christian environment for minors and their relationships with adults involved in Church ministry.

BACKGROUND

This Policy was written and published in 2004. It was developed in cooperation with the Oakland Diocesan Presbyteral Council with the assistance of other protocol documents from other dioceses. It is to be considered a working document that will be revised as needed under the direction of the Bishop of Oakland.

Responsibility for adherence to this Policy rests with those involved in Church ministry or service themselves. It is anticipated however, that disregard of this Policy by such persons will be dealt with by the appropriate employing/appointing organization (e.g. the parish, the religious order, the diocesan bishop). Remedial action may take various forms from counseling to removal from ministry.

The conduct of ministers and employees, both public and private, has the potential to inspire and motivate people or scandalize and tear down their faith. They must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their ministry. They must also know that God's goodness and graces support them in their ministry.

GUIDELINES WITH REGARD TO MINISTRY TO MINORS

1. Any and all involvement with minors is to be approached from the premise that minors should always be viewed – whether in a social or ministerial situation – as restricted individuals, that is, they are not independent. Wherever they are and whatever they do is to be with the explicit knowledge and consent of their parents or guardians. They are subject to specific civil laws in the State of California, which may prohibit certain activities. They are not adults and are not permitted unfettered decisions.

2. Adults should avoid situations which place them in a position to be alone with a minor in the rectory, parish residence, school, or in a closed room other than a confessional.

3. In meeting and/or pastoral counseling situations involving a minor, excluding Sacramental Reconciliation, the presence or proximity of another adult is encouraged. However, in those situations where the presence of another adult is not usual or practical (e.g. piano lessons, disciplinary meeting with an

administrator, etc.) another adult should be informed that the meeting will be taking place, the meeting place should be accessible and visible with the door where the meeting is taking place left ajar unless there is a clear window built into the door.

4. An unaccompanied minor is allowed only in the professional section of the rectory or parish residence, never in the living quarters.

5. Minors age 16 and over are permitted to work in the rectory, parish residence, school or parish facility, when there would normally be at least two adults present, i.e. over 21 years of age. Minors under age 16 may not be hired to work in any capacity for a parish, school or diocese.

6. At least two adults, one of whom is to be the same sex as the participants, are to be present when a group of minors engages in organized games or sports activities.

7. Adults are to avoid being the only adult in a bathroom, shower room, locker room or other dressing areas whenever minors are using such facilities.

8. Youth group trips of any kind must have a minimum of two adult chaperones, at least one of whom should be of the same sex as the young people. Larger groups must have at least one adult chaperone for every ten minors.

9. While on youth trips, the adults as well as the minors, may not use alcohol or controlled substances and anyone under the influence of these substances may not participate in the event.

10. One adult alone shall never engage in an overnight trip with a minor or minors.

11. While on youth group trips, clergy or lay leaders are never to stay alone overnight in the same motel/hotel room with a minor or minors.

12. The sacristy door is always to be unlocked whenever minors are present within the sacristy.

13. Comments of a sexual nature are not be made to any minor except in response to specific classroom or otherwise legitimate questions from a minor.

14. Topics or vocabulary such as profanity, cursing and vulgar humor which could not comfortably be used in the presence of parents/guardians or another adult, shall not be used in the presence of a minor/minors.

15. Adults are absolutely prohibited from serving or supplying alcohol, cigarettes, inappropriate reading material or controlled substances to minors. Alcoholic beverages shall not be served or consumed at parish or school social activities intended primarily for minors.

16. Audiovisual, music and print resources used in programs must be screened prior to use to ensure their appropriateness for the participants. It is never appropriate to use an "R" rated movie or movies rated with an even stronger designation. Music lyrics should also be reviewed to insure appropriateness.

17. Careful boundaries concerning physical contact with a minor must be observed at all times and (beyond a handshake) should only occur under public circumstances. Prudent discretion and respect must be shown before touching another person in any way.

18. Some adaptation in applying these guidelines when the minor is a relative ought to be the norm, but appearances in public nevertheless need to be maintained.

19. Clear violations of these standards as well as any sexual misconduct should be reported immediately to the appropriate parish, diocesan or civil authority.

GUIDELINES WITH REGARD TO THE PASTORAL COUNSELING OF MINORS

A. Pastoral counseling of a minor must take place only in the professional portion of a rectory or parish residence, never in the living quarters.

B. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be celebrated in a place so designated for that purpose: reconciliation chapel or confessional. Only extreme inconvenience or impossibility would be an acceptable excuse to deviate from this standard.

C. If possible, offices or classrooms used for pastoral counseling of a minor should have a window in the door or the door is to be left ajar during the counseling session.

D. If possible, another adult should be in close proximity during any counseling session.

E. Unless the subject matter precludes their presence or knowledge, parents or guardians of minors should be made aware of the counseling session.

F. If counseling is expected to extend beyond one session, evaluation of the situation should be made with the parents or guardians.

G. The adult is responsible to recognize any personal/physical attraction to or from a minor. In such a situation, the minor should be immediately referred to another qualified adult or licensed professional.

Diocese of Oakland

Policy of Expectations and Guidelines For Ministry to Minors

I have read and understand the content of the Policy of Expectations and Guidelines for Ministry to Minors for the Diocese of Oakland.

I understand that as a pastoral staff member or a volunteer working with children and/or youth, I am subject to a thorough background check including criminal history.

I understand that any action inconsistent with this policy regarding minors or failure to take action mandated by this policy may result in my removal as a staff member or a volunteer with children and/or youth.

_____ _____

Your Name (print clearly) **Your Signature**

_____

Your Address (print clearly)

_____ _____

Name of Parish or School **City**

Employee____ Volunteer ____ Position(s):_____

Site of Training: _____ Date of Training: _____

Trainer signature: _____

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(09/2008)