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Our Mission with the Safe Environment Program

The Archdiocese of Seattle has been identified as a national leader in our efforts towards child abuse prevention. Our Safe Environment Program is a response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The Archdiocese is actively committed to ensuring that all of our volunteers, staff and clergy work together to provide safe parishes and schools for all children as well as vulnerable adults.

The Three Elements of the Safe Environment Program

These are the three elements of the Safe Environment Program:

1. **Criminal Background Check** – before or on the first day of service and renewed every three years.
2. **Abuse Prevention Policies** – read and signed before or on the first day of service.
3. **Safe Environment Training** – initial in-person or internet-based training session within 30 days of starting service; online renewal training every three years.

All Church Personnel, as defined below, must fulfill all three of these requirements.

Definition of Church Personnel

As defined in the *Policy for the Prevention of & Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct & Sexual Harassment*, Church Personnel include the following:

- Priests & Deacons (clerics)
- Seminarians, Deacon Candidates, and Deacon Aspirants
- Religious (men and women)
- Lay Faithful
 - All paid employees of the parishes, schools or agencies of the Archdiocese
 - All volunteers who have contact with minors or vulnerable adults in their volunteer capacity in parish or school sponsored ministries and activities.

Safe Environment Coordinator Responsibilities

Each parish, school, or agency of the Archdiocese of Seattle must have a person designated to coordinate the Safe Environment efforts at their location.

The local Safe Environment Coordinator will:

- Serve as the local contact person for the Safe Environment Program (SEP)
- Ensure that all Church Personnel are fully compliant with the current Safe Environment requirements
- Ensure that all required tracking forms are submitted to the SEP office.
 - **Schools:** Teaching Safety Recording Form – this must be filled out completely and emailed to the SEP office no later than the deadline determined by SEP.
 - **Parishes:** Teaching Safety Recording Form – this must be filled out completely and emailed to the SEP office no later than the deadline determined by SEP.
 - **Parishes, Schools and Chancery Departments:** Annual Compliance Verification Form no later than May 31st each year.
- In cooperation with the facilitator, coordinate as needed the *Protecting God's Children for Adults* in-person sessions:
 - Schedule sessions and submit facility requests
 - Publicize through parish bulletins, school newsletters, websites, etc.
 - Assist with class logistics – set-up/clean-up, registrations, emailing roster to SEP office, etc.
- Manage all Safe Environment compliance and record keeping, including:
 - Background Checks
 - Abuse Prevention Polices
 - Safe Environment Training
- Oversee local administration of Virtus and Trak-1 Databases

As the local coordinator, you are ultimately responsible for the Safe Environment Program at your site. However, you may delegate responsibilities as you see fit. See "*Implementing Safe Environment in Your Parish or School*" on page 4 for ideas about organizing the program at your location.

Implementing Safe Environment in Your Location

As the local coordinator, you have the option to structure and manage the Safe Environment Program in a number of different ways to best suit the needs of your location.

Below are a few examples of different ways to organize Safe Environment at your parish, school or chancery department:

- The local Safe Environment Coordinator address all aspects of Safe Environment for all location programs.
- The local Safe Environment Coordinator is the primary SEP contact but has designated one or more SE assistants who are also trained. This team approach provides backup if the primary local coordinator is away as well as support for managing compliance.
- The local Safe Environment Coordinator designates the head of each program to manage Safe Environment requirements for participants in their programs.

You are encouraged to organize the program as it is convenient for your location. However, remember that you are ultimately responsible for managing the compliance of your location and will report to your pastor, principal or department lead annually prior to them signing the annual Compliance Verification Form.

Getting Started: Setting-Up Safe Environment

If you are a **new** local coordinator, here are a few steps to getting started:

- Notify the Safe Environment office that you are now the coordinator for your location. You must be endorsed by your administrator or principal. Please ask them to email the Safe Environment office with that endorsement: sep@seattlearch.org.
- Arrange for new coordinator training with the Safe Environment office. This training will give you the information and confidence you need to be a success in your new role.
- Navigate the Safe Environment website located on the Archdiocese of Seattle web page and become familiar with the resources there.
- Talk with the staff at your location to learn the local procedures and protocols already in place. Keep in mind that some information passed down historically may no longer be accurate as the Safe Environment Program updates protocols and policies. Be sure to always use current information and forms.
- Familiarize yourself with the Virtus and Trak-1 databases (*administrative access within Virtus and Trak-1 account access must be updated when there is a new local coordinator*)
- Use the [Master Report](#) and [Background Check Report](#) to assess the status of your location compliance. This is an on-going process, suggested monthly at a minimum.
 - Do all Church Personnel have a current criminal background check?
 - Have all Church Personnel signed off on the abuse prevention policies?
 - Are all Church Personnel up-to-date with their required Safe Environment training?

Record Keeping for Safe Environment Program

Adult Church Personnel

The Virtus Database is the central database for the Safe Environment Program in the Archdiocese of Seattle. This database contains the official training records, background check results, and policy sign-off documentation for all Church Personnel. Virtus Database has been in use since July 2015 and is our permanent database for all Safe Environment records.

All adults must have a Virtus profile if they are employed. In addition, a Virtus profile is required for potential employees; volunteers working with money or driving as part of their work; and volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults as part of their duties.

PeopleFacts/Trak-1 is our criminal background search vendor and all background check reports are stored permanently in this database. Copies of actual reports may be obtained and printed as needed by authorized staff through your location account in Trak-1.

As of September 2023 it is no longer required for locations to print background checks or training certificates. Historical records are maintained in Virtus for all Safe Environment requirements.

To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Children's Training

In addition to the employee/volunteer records detailed above, schools and parishes are also responsible for record keeping of the Safe Environment training for the students of Catholic Schools and Parish faith formation programs. The teaching safety program is required for all children grades K-10 and is optional for grades 11 & 12.

The following records must be provided by each location to the Safe Environment office each year as part of our USCCB Safe Environment Audit documentation:

- I. **Recording Form** – one form compiling all grade levels per location. Each grade level must include the following information:
 - Date of lesson/name of person(s) teaching lesson
 - Number of children enrolled in grade level

- Number of children trained
- Number of children absent
- Number of children opted-out

II. **Opt-Out requests** – written request from parent specifying child(ren) and grade level.

Minors Working with Younger Children

Minors under the age of 18 are not able to create a profile in the Virtus database. Safe Environment records for all minors must be retained permanently in paper form. A binder or other suitable filing system stored where you keep confidential records would be appropriate. See "*Church Personnel Under Age 18*" on page 13 for a full description of the procedure and requirements.

Annual Compliance Verification Form

Each location is responsible for ensuring ongoing compliance with Safe Environment policy and requirements for all Church Personnel in their location.

The annual **Compliance Verification Form** process is as follows:

- I. Form emailed by Safe Environment office to all locations in early to mid-April each year.
- II. Locations review current compliance status of all active Church Personnel and work to bring those who are non-compliant into compliance.
- III. Once all active Church Personnel are fully compliant prepare the form with the data requested.
- IV. Form must be signed by pastor, priest administrator, pastoral coordinator, school principal or chancery department lead.
- V. Forms must be emailed to the Safe Environment office no later than May 31st each year.

Local coordinators are strongly encouraged to conduct ongoing compliance management regularly throughout the year, since volunteers and employees are continually coming due to renew their SE requirements, and new volunteers and employees are being added to locations periodically.

The Master Report created through the Virtus Database is a helpful tool for monitoring compliance. Best practice is to create a Master Report regularly, every month or so depending on the size and volume of Church Personnel at your location. This report is for your use and does not need to be provided to the Safe Environment office.

Please email all required forms on or prior to the deadline date to sep@seattlearch.org
PLEASE DO NOT MAIL ANY DOCUMENTATION TO THE CHANCERY

Safe Environment Checklist For Adults

BACKGROUND CHECKS

☐ All Church Personnel have successfully completed a criminal background check, before or on their first day of service and maintain a clear criminal background check every three years while in active service. Background checks must be conducted through the Virtus/Trak-1 databases for the Archdiocese of Seattle.

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES

- ☐ All Church Personnel have read and signed *Church Personnel Policies* before or on their first day of service.
- Prior to July 1, 2015- All *Safe Environment Program Church Personnel Agreement Forms* are required to be kept in personnel/volunteer file in perpetuity.
 - After July 1, 2015 – All *Safe Environment Program Church Personnel Policy Documents* are retained permanently in the Virtus database.**

SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING

- ☐ All new Church Personnel have completed the *Protecting God's Children for Adults* in-person session **OR** Online Awareness 4.0 session within **30** days of beginning service.
- Prior to July 1, 2015- All certificates of completion or attendance verification are required to be kept in personnel/volunteer file in perpetuity.
 - After July 1, 2015 – All training documentation and certificates of completion are retained permanently in the Virtus database.**
- ☐ All Church Personnel have completed update training at their required time (every three years).
- Prior to July 1, 2015- All certificates of completion are required to be kept in personnel/volunteer file in perpetuity.
 - After July 1, 2015 – All training documentation and certificates of completion are retained permanently in the Virtus database.**

** To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Safe Environment Checklist For Children's Teaching Safety

- ❑ K through Grade 10 (grades 11 & 12 optional)
 - *Circle of Grace* teaching safety lessons completed for all required grade levels in all parish Faith Formation programs and all Catholic schools.

- ❑ Recording Form
 - Compiled form for all grade levels documenting student attendance

- ❑ Opt-Outs
 - There is no formal form for opt-outs. ***Please do not use old forms from Virtus – they are no longer in use.*** After receiving the general parent letter in anticipation of the *Circle of Grace* lessons, parents may contact the location if they have questions about opting their child(ren) out. The location would then request from Parent a written request naming each child and their grade level.

****** To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Please email all required forms on or prior to the deadline date to sep@seattlearch.org

PLEASE DO NOT MAIL ANY DOCUMENTATION TO THE CHANCERY

Safe Environment Checklist
For Minors Working with Younger Children
See page 13 for full protocol

- ❑ Code of Professional Conduct Form
 - Form has been reviewed with youth by parent/guardian, signed/dated and returned to local SE coordinator for filing

- ❑ Background Check Authorization Form for youth age 16-17 (prior to 18th b-day)
 - Authorization Form is completed and signed by parent/guardian and has been submitted to Trak-1 for criminal background search.

- ❑ Adult supervision arranged for all minors and for young adults age 18-21
 - Young adults age 18-21 must have an SEP-certified adult over the age of 21 on-site at all times

** To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Outside Organizations & Individuals

The Archdiocese of Seattle has a long-standing commitment to the protection of children and vulnerable adults who serve and are served in our parishes, schools, and agencies. Our Safe Environment Program coordinates abuse prevention efforts throughout the Archdiocese with a variety of measures including background checks, training, and development and implementation of related policies.

As part of those policies, any vendors, contractors, subcontractors, service providers, and all other parties ("Organization") whose duties include contact with minors or vulnerable adults while working with a parish, school, or agency of the Archdiocese of Seattle (an "Archdiocesan location") must go through our Safe Environments Program or operate their own equivalent program. Click here to access the [Safe Environment Program and Insurance Requirements Matrix](#) for decision-making regarding outside organizations and outside individuals.

Organizations with their own Child Safeguarding or Child Protection Program may satisfy this requirement by completing the [Safe Environment Compliance Form for Outside Organizations Working in Contact with Minors](#) to certify they have met key standards to protect minors or vulnerable adults from abuse of all kinds. This form must be completed, signed, and dated by an authorized officer, director, or agent of the Organization and must be returned to the Archdiocesan location before conducting business or providing services at the Archdiocesan location.

CYO Athletics

The CYO Athletic Program includes over 1000 teams in soccer, track, volleyball, baseball, basketball and cross-country. Thousands of volunteers serve as Parish Athletic Directors (ADs), Coaches, and Assistant Coaches to keep the program running.

Most CYO Athletics programs fall under the leadership of the local parish/school. It is the parish/school responsibility to ensure that all appropriate volunteers satisfy the requirements of the Safe Environment Program, both initially and every three years according to the Archdiocesan renewal policy.

You should work with the parish/school Athletic Director to ensure all coaches and assistant coaches on the team rosters are compliant with Safe Environment requirements.

All Coaches, whether serving as Head Coach or Assistant Coach, must fulfill all Safe Environment requirements.

Any parent who wishes to assist the Head Coach must be listed as an Assistant Coach on the team roster. As Assistant Coaches, they must fulfill the Safe Environment requirements.

All CYO Athletics volunteers must identify in their Virtus profile the parish and/or school that they will be serving at. In addition, be sure that the CYO Coach role is listed in their profile.

Level II Catholic Schools & CYO

All Level II Catholic School employees & volunteers who participate in CYO Athletics, must fulfill the Safe Environment requirements through the Level II school as defined in their organization's policies.

Level II Catholic Schools are responsible for all administration, record keeping, and costs associated with fulfilling the Safe Environment requirements outlined in the *Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People*.

Non-Catholic Organizations & CYO

All non-Catholic Organizations must complete the [Safe Environment Compliance Form for Outside Organizations Working in Contact with Minors](#) which includes verification of Safe Environment compliance according to their own organizational safeguarding policy and requirements. Please see page 12 for further information regarding Outside Organizations.

Church Personnel Under Age 18 Minors Working with Younger Children

For our purposes, 'minor' is defined as any child under the age of 18. If they have reached their 18th birthday they are considered adults. Minors do NOT create Virtus profiles. (The system will not even allow them to do so.)

Minors do NOT take any type of training. Again, no Virtus profile, no training. Most of them have been exposed to the Teaching Safety lessons from Catholic school or Faith Formation – so they are typically already familiar with Safe Environment prevention and awareness.

- **All minors** must sign a [Code of Professional Conduct Form](#). Provide this form to the parent/guardian who will in turn discuss the information with the minor. Both the parent/guardian and the minor must sign/date the form verifying understanding our Archdiocesan Safe Environment policy in regard to minors who work with younger children.
- Minors age 16 – 18 (prior to 18th bday) must apply for a background check. Use the appropriate manual BGC form (i.e. there is one form for [volunteer minors](#) and a different form for [employee minors](#)). Their parent/guardian must sign the form giving approval for the search. Do not submit the background check without the signature/date of parent/guardian on the form (in two places).
- Both of these forms (Code of Conduct, and BGC Authorization if needed) must be returned to the parish SEP coordinator for processing. The minor may not begin work until all completed forms have been received and background check resulted. All documentation should be retained in paper form permanently, in a special binder or file.
- Minors may not work in a capacity in which they supervise children, unless they themselves are supervised by someone age 21 or older.
- When the minor reaches 18 years old they will need to be instructed to create their Virtus profile. The manual background check result can then be entered manually into the BGC tab in Virtus. The system will not allow them to submit another BGC if it is within the 3 years. Instead, record the initial one from "minor" into Virtus when they are no longer considered a minor. Please note the date on the report, indicate that it was submitted manually when the individual was a minor, and be sure to type in the "all clear" results in the comments box.

Virtus Profiles

All Church Personnel over the age of 18 (adults) must create a profile in Virtus to meet and maintain the requirements of the Safe Environment Program. ** The onus is on the individual to create the profile, meet the initial requirements, and maintain current requirements to continue in active service within the Archdiocese of Seattle. *Please contact the SEP office to discuss options if you have an individual who is unable to create their own profile.*

** The only exception is court-appointed service at St. Leo's Food Connection or St. Mary's Foodbank.

Background Check Submissions

Background checks must be authorized by each individual (or a parent/guardian in the case of minors) requesting a criminal background check search. Applications are initiated through the individual's Virtus profile: they are re-directed to the Trak-1 database to give authorization and complete their application. Once submission is complete, the user will be directed back to their Virtus profile to complete any other needed Safe Environment requirements.

Manual background checks are conducted on all minors age 16-17 (prior to 18th birthday) or in other rare cases where an individual user may have difficulty submitting it themselves through Virtus. These steps must be followed:

1. Local SE coordinator obtains the appropriate background check authorization form (adult vs minor, employee vs volunteer) completed by the individual, signed and dated. In the case of minors, a parent or guardian must sign and date the form. Review the form for accuracy before proceeding to step 2.
2. Local SE coordinator submits the criminal background check through the Trak-1 database online application. Be sure to review all information on the preview page. Errors are especially common with incorrect birthdates. Please verify the date of birth prior to submission.
3. Once all information is verified on the application, click the submit button. The report will be available typically within 2-3 days.
4. Local SE coordinator will receive a notification from Trak-1 when the background check is resulted in the Trak-1 database.
5. Record keeping:
 - **Adults:** record the background check "all clear" in the individual's Virtus profile. Please contact the Safe Environment office if you are unsure how to record a manual background check.
 - **Minors:** print the background check report from the Trak-1 database. Staple to the background check authorization form and file in a permanent file in the parish or school office.

BACKGROUND CHECK RETURNED WITH CRIMINAL HISTORY

When the result of a criminal background check returns “flagged” with a criminal history, the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Program Coordinator will review the results to determine if the individual is suitable to work or volunteer with or near minors or vulnerable adults. Possible determinations include but are not limited to:

- All clear: no restrictions or limitations
- Not eligible to drive as part of work for a specified time
- No access to cash, checks, or other negotiables
- No unsupervised access to minors or vulnerable adults
- Not eligible for work of any kind

By law there is a waiting period before a determination is made, to give an individual the opportunity to dispute a background check that they feel is in error. Typically a determination notification will be sent to the location 7-10 days after the individual has been notified of the results.

DESIGNATED EMAIL FOR RECEIVING BGC DETERMINATIONS

Locations are strongly encouraged to set up a designated email address for communicating background check determinations. Many locations no longer use fax machines. To facilitate prompt turnaround of documentation for flagged background check determinations, designated email is preferred because it does not depend on the local coordinator being present at the location to receive the fax in-person.

You can find the Email Protocol on the SEP website here: [Email Protocol for Background Check Determinations](#).

Important Things to Know about the Background Check Process

Social Security Number

The Archdiocese of Seattle does not use the Social Security Number as part of our criminal background search application. Background check searches are conducted using the individual's name and date of birth. No other sensitive information is used.

Credit Reports

The Federal Government considers criminal background checks a type of "credit report" because they are conducted by companies that are considered "consumer-reporting agencies". Although these third party vendors often provide organizations around the United States with credit history, the Archdiocese of Seattle does NOT obtain any financial, credit or other personal information history. The criminal background search is the only information garnered by the Archdiocese of Seattle, and it is only reported after an individual has given authorization for the criminal background search.

Privacy

Remember that background check applications, authorizations and reports contain confidential information. Respect the privacy of your applicants at all times. Background check results and final determinations are confidential information and should not be shared except with your location administrator/principal on a "need to know" basis.

Sex Offender Guidelines: Directions for Parish Implementation

A Sex Offender may become known to the parish leadership in three primary ways:

1. A sex offender may come forward and disclose his/her criminal background.
2. A sex offender may apply to volunteer in the parish. In the course of processing the background check, their criminal history is revealed.
3. A member of your parish/school community may be aware of the sex offender's status and come forward with information.

Once a sex offender is made known to parish leadership, the Sex Offender Guidelines must be implemented.

Please contact the Safe Environment office in the event that the Sex Offender Guidelines need to be implemented. 206.382.4285.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Parishes, schools and agencies of the Archdiocese of Seattle are encouraged to use this opportunity to highlight the importance of Child Abuse Prevention.

Each year, the Safe Environment Program distributes materials to assist these efforts.

Prior April Child Abuse Prevention Month Packets have included:

- Weekly bulletin inserts
- Intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful for Sunday liturgies
- Activities for children/youth
- Resources and materials from the USCCB

Materials will be sent out at the beginning of March. If you have special requests or ideas on how we can honor April Child Abuse Prevention Month, contact the Safe Environment Program.