Model SOP for Parish

The purpose of a Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) is to provide guidance for each person as to how their respective ministry might be carried out safely and effectively.

Each ministry will benefit from an SOP that addresses not only Safe Environment Program concerns but also addresses issues associated with the way in which the ministry should be carried out to insure correct adherence to pastoral and liturgical prescriptions.

The Safe Environment Program component of an SOP should be constructed to reduce the likelihood of harm to those served as well as to reduce the likelihood of allegations that arise from misperceptions or mistrust. A proper SOP that is followed carefully will also make it much more likely that a false allegation can be successfully defended.

The following principles constitute a general SOP for the parish and should be referenced or incorporated in each SOP in the parish, as applicable.

Leadership

* All ministry leaders should be familiar with the Safe Environment Program in general and the compliance plan of the parish in particular.
* Each ministry leader is responsible to develop, submit and follow a Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) for his or her particular ministry.
* Each ministry leader is expected to work collaboratively with the Compliance Officer of the Parish.

Screening

* No person with a history of sexual misconduct with a minor can be employed or engaged as a volunteer, regardless of role.
* All persons applying to serve as an employee or volunteer must submit the proper application, be interviewed, and allow for a background check; even low responsibility volunteers, who do not undergo a criminal history check, should allow for a check of references and history as outlined in the compliance plan.

Education

* Each new employee and volunteer should be oriented to the Code of Conduct, the mandatory reporting law of the State and the SOP of his or her particular ministry.
* Each employee and volunteer should be updated with respect the same subjects at least once per three years; high responsibility volunteers will benefit from more frequent updates.

Supervision

* General
  + Accountability is not the enemy of privacy, but of secrecy. Secrecy is the breeding ground for abuse. Accountability includes being “visible” with respect to what, when, where and how a ministry or service is being provided. Any employee or volunteer is expected to be accountable regarding his or her activities.
  + The more responsible the role of the employee or volunteer, the more risk is associated with the role. Such an employee or volunteer must learn to carry himself or herself as a public figure within the parish community.
  + Dress appropriate to the role is an important aspect of carrying one’s self as a public figure.
  + Appropriate speech is equally important in maintaining one’s self as a person who is in service to others.
  + Behavior that singles out any one person among those served may signal increased risk and certainly invites misinterpretation; it should be avoided.
* Maintaining visibility
  + An employee or volunteer should not be alone with minors other than his or her own children. If the situation is unavoidable due to emergency or unavoidable conditions, the employee or volunteer should call another person on the team to seek assistance and/or to document the occurrence at the time it is happening.
  + An employee or volunteer should avoid meeting with anyone he or she is serving in isolated circumstances or at odd hours. Visits to the home of a person being served or visits by the person being served to the home of the employee or volunteer are high risk events and should never be done without the company of another employee or volunteer.
  + It is difficult for any person to accurately observe his or her own behavior; all persons in ministry should welcome and even seek out feedback from others.
* Boundaries
  + Touch must be done with discretion and with respect for the comfort of the person being touched. Touch that might reasonably be construed as romantic or sexual is never appropriate.
  + Prudent behavior includes recognition and respect for interpersonal boundaries. Maintaining healthy interpersonal boundaries requires sensitivity to the reactions of others and awareness of one’s self. Ongoing education to enhance interpersonal sensitivity is critical for any employee or volunteer in a role of high responsibility and risk.
* Working with minors
  + Minors being served should be given clear rules for behavior during any class or group, especially if this includes an outing of any type.
  + Any outing with youth should include an adequate number of adult chaperones. This rule is especially important when an overnight stay is included.
  + Minors in volunteer service are not immune from the need to follow rules of prudent behavior. Minors can offend with other minors and are also vulnerable to false allegations.

Reporting

* Reasonable suspicion that a child may have been abused or is in danger of being abused must lead to an immediate report to law enforcement.
  + The initial call should be to 9-1-1.
  + If the suspicion leads to someone in the home as a possible abuser, the second call should be to Child Protective Services, 888-SOS-CHILD.
* Reasonable suspicion that a vulnerable adult (defined as such in the law) may have been abused or exploited must lead to an immediate report to law enforcement.
  + In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.
  + In most cases, call Adult Protective Services, 877-SOS-ADULT.
* Concerns about imprudent behavior should be brought to the attention of the Pastor or Compliance Officer.
* In all cases, make an informational report directly or through parish leadership to the Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection, 520-838-2513.