



630 Richland Avenue | Baton Rouge, LA 70806

## SAFE CHURCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES

*Approved by the Holy Cross Parish Council on June 23rd, 2025.*

### A. Introduction

**1. Biblical Basis.** The Biblical basis and necessity of these Policies & Procedures are set forth in the following excerpts from a letter from our Bishop, Clark WP Lowenfield, dated January 28, 2022:

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)

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The Holy Scriptures speak of the Church as the Body of Christ and His bride. God calls His Church and all Her members to a life of holiness, service, and love of neighbor. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, calls us to be ministers of His gospel for a broken world. We are guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to participate in God’s redemption of the whole of creation. As a community of faith, the Church stands for truth, justice, mercy, compassion, reconciliation, service, and sacrifice. The Church serves as a field hospital, where the broken may enter and encounter the love, grace, peace, and healing power of Christ’s redemption. This is central to our vocation.

To this end, the parishes of The Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast must be safe. Our responsibility to shepherd the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of each person is essential.... In order to be light in a dark world, the Church.... must take action in order to equip leaders to safeguard those in its care.

The congregations of the Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast join the College of Bishops and leaders across the Anglican Church in North America in affirming the following:

- God’s CREATION is a good gift
- Humanity is PART OF creation yet UNIQUE
  - IMAGE OF GOD: Every human being is created in the image of God and has inherent worth and dignity.
- Humanity is uniquely CALLED to stewardship/care in love
  - STEWARD: The Church is called to steward God’s creation [including humanity/Church] and His bride, the Church.
  - RESPECT: This understanding of sexuality calls for equal respect for all men, women,

and children as persons made in God's image, and for everyone's right to sexual and physical integrity.

- Humanity is embodied and communal and has received the good gift of sex to be enjoyed within covenant
  - SEX IS A GIFT: Sexuality is good, blessed, and purposeful; sexuality is understood to be a gift that is celebrated by sexual union within the bond of love found within the covenant of a man and a woman in marriage.
- Humanity is Broken
  - VULNERABLE: Children, adolescents, the infirm, and elderly are particularly vulnerable to the tragic consequences of broken covenants and abusive treatment, and special care must be taken to protect their individual rights and personal integrity.
- Church is About the Restoration of Humanity
  - JUSTICE: All types of abuse (verbal, physical, neglect, and sexual misconduct) will be taken seriously by the Diocese and, when required by law, will be reported to the appropriate local, state, and/or federal agency.
  - PROTECTION: The protection of the vulnerable shall be of utmost concern.
  - RESPONSIBILITY: The Church has always recognized that those chosen for ordained ministry bear a particular responsibility to pattern their lives according to Jesus' teaching. Bishops, priests, deacons, and lay leaders are called to be faithful examples of the Christian life. Any moral offense by clergy or laity entrusted with pastoral and educational ministries is especially hurtful because it betrays the trust committed to each by the Church to nurture and care for every member.

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*“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”*  
(John 10:9b-11)

As the Body of Christ, we are called to be children of light, uncovering what is done in the darkness, and to protect and care for the vulnerable in our midst....

**2. Matters Included in these Policies and Procedures:** These Policies and Procedures cover not only sexual misconduct and harassment of children and adults, but other forms of misconduct, including but not limited to:

- (a) questionable or improper accounting or auditing practices
- (b) suspected unlawful conduct
- (c) violations or suspected violations of Church or Diocesan policies or Canons
- (d) any observed or suspected verbal, emotional, or spiritual abuse
- (e) any suspected sexual misconduct

From this point forward, all of the above will be collectively referred to as “concerns.”

## B. 5-Step Approach to Child Protection

Child abuse, in practical terms, refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child daily) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. Each state and the District of Columbia has its own definition of what constitutes child abuse under civil and criminal laws, and each parish in the Diocese should be familiar with the relevant laws and legal definitions in its jurisdiction. In general, the definitions of child abuse and child neglect in all states include the following elements (among others):

- Physical abuse
- Neglect (both physical and mental)
- Sexual abuse/Exploitation

“Abuse” and “neglect” under Louisiana law are broad. “Abuse” includes many acts that seriously endanger the physical, mental, or emotional health and safety of the child. LA CHIL. CODE ANN. art. 603(2). “Neglect” means the refusal or unreasonable failure of a parent or caregiver to supply necessities for the child's wellbeing, resulting in the substantial threat or impairment to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health and safety. LA CHIL. CODE ANN. art. 603(18).

Holy Cross Anglican Church (the Parish) will not tolerate any form of child abuse involving our clergy, lay employees, volunteers, or other persons. Everyone who serves the Parish through educational, pastoral, recreational or other activities is expected to maintain the highest biblical standards in relationships with those to whom they minister, avoiding any form of misconduct against children. The following 5-step approach will be employed to accomplish this:

**1. SCREENING** is an opportunity to prevent a molester from ever having contact with children and youth in our programs. Our careful screening of employees and volunteers in youth and children's ministries includes:

- a. Reviewing signed standard applications for all paid staff and for all volunteers in youth and children's ministries.
- b. Conducting National Sexual Offender Registry/Criminal Background checks and renewing them every two years.
- c. Conducting personal and professional reference checks and a thorough social media search.
- d. Conducting face-to-face interviews.
- e. Requiring a signature stating that clergy, employees, volunteers, and other adult members of their households have not been arrested for or convicted of child abuse or diagnosed with certain psychiatric conditions such as voyeurism or exhibitionism. (A Screening Questionnaires form is available in the Church office. See Part E, below.)
- f. Requiring a six-month minimum attendance and membership in the local parish for all volunteers serving in children's and youth ministries.

**2. TRAINING** puts the power to protect in everyone's hands and is an important deterrent to child abuse. Those who work with children or youth must be trained to recognize the warning signs of potential abuse, commit to the safe practices specific to the Parish and learn the procedures for reporting suspected abuse.

- a. Reading Requirements: All members of the clergy, all members of the vestry, leadership council or equivalent and those staff members and volunteers with direct supervision over youth or children must certify that they have read, understood, and accepted the Parish's policies on the protection of children and sign an acknowledgment form. The Acknowledgment of Receipt and Training form is available in the Church office. (See Part E, below.)
- b. Workshop Attendance Requirements: Upon hiring or first volunteering, and thereafter every two years, clergy, vestry, leadership council or equivalent, and those staff and volunteers who have contact with youth and children must complete a diocesan approved awareness training as well as diocesan approved training on the policy itself.
- c. The Parish is responsible for tracking and documenting the training/retraining of its vestry or equivalent, staff and volunteers. Clergy, Vestry (or designated lay leadership board or council) and staff should complete training within three months of hire or election. Volunteers must complete training prior to serving with youth or children.

**3. INTERACTING** helps children and adults feel safe in ministry and helps detect problems before they turn into an incident of abuse. Verbal interactions between clergy, staff members, or volunteers and children should be positive, constructive, and encouraging. Staff members and volunteers should avoid talking to children, parents, or caregivers in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Social media avenues are important ways for youth ministry staff and volunteer leaders to connect with students. Clergy, staff members and volunteers shall refrain from connecting with students on social media when students are younger than the minimum age as established by each social media outlet. Online behavior is treated equal to in-person behavior including two adult rule, appropriate language, tone, attire, topics and obtaining parental consent for connections.

Photos of children will not be used contrary to the wishes of parent(s). The Parish will refrain from posting any personally identifying information about children pictured online or in print publications without prior permission from parent(s). A Sample Release & Permission to Use Images form is available in the Church office. (See Part E, below.)

Children's staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch.

Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child and never be based on the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer. It is the diocesan policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for the behavioral management of children. No form of physical discipline is acceptable.

Appropriate interactions may include:

- Smiles
- Encouragement
- Handshakes and high fives
- Fist bumps
- Thumbs up
- Side to side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Arm around the shoulder
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Holding or picking up children who are 4 years old and younger

Inappropriate interactions include:

- Spanking, slapping, or any form of physical discipline
- Shaming or belittling a child or youth
- Meeting alone in unobservable or isolated places
- Swearing in the presence of children
- Engaging in sexually-oriented communications with or in proximity to children
- Using, possessing, or being under the influence of tobacco products, alcohol, or any illegal drugs when in the presence of children
- Wrestling
- Tickling
- Sitting in laps (except for nursery-aged children)
- Kissing on the lips
- Full frontal hugs or “bear hugs”
- Commenting on children’s bodies
- Forcing unwanted affection
- Being nude in front of children (such as on overnight trips, changing at pool parties, etc.)
- Contacting or “friending” a child on youth social networking sites without the parent’s permission
- Showing favoritism or possessiveness
- Calling, emailing, or texting too often (singling a child out – “grooming” a child)
- Giving gifts to children without the parent’s permission
- Ridiculing the beliefs of a child or youth or those of their parents
- Allowing a child or youth to do things against the wishes of the parents
- Offering children or youth cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs
- Allowing children or youth to view pornography or to visit inappropriate internet sites
- Asking a child or youth to keep “secrets” from his or her parents or caregivers
- Wearing provocative or revealing attire
- Taking pictures while children are dressing or showering

Staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care at the close of services or activities only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians. It is presumed that a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

If staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately contact their immediate supervisor before releasing the child.

In the event staff members or volunteers provide transportation for children or youth, the following guidelines should be observed whenever possible:

- Adult volunteer drivers must provide to the Parish copies of valid driver's licenses, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance.
- Adult volunteer drivers must undergo an insurance approved background check including a DMV record check.

**4. MONITORING** allows us to detect problems before they turn into an incident of abuse and helps adults avoid wrongful allegations of abuse when none has occurred. Research confirms that off-site activities increase the risk of abuse. Vestry or equivalent, clergy, staff, and volunteers must always be diligent in monitoring and supervising children's and youth activities in all settings.

It is imperative to be vigilant about the possibility of peer-on-peer abuse. 30-50 % of youth are sexually abused by other youth. Peer-on-peer abuse often escalates from bullying and often occurs when one youth holds some form of power imbalance over another such as age, size, intelligence, and gender. Comprehensive and engaged supervision is essential to preventing peer-on-peer abuse.

Our monitoring practices include the following:

**TWO ADULT RULE:** All children and youth activities shall be designed to be always supervised by two or more screened and trained individuals.

**SUPERVISORY PLANS:** An onsite or offsite written Supervisory Plan, that includes all items detailed in the preceding provisions on "Interacting," shall be in place for all educational, pastoral, recreational, or other programming that involves youth or children. Those tasked with supervising youth or children for a specific program must understand their responsibilities as outlined and sign a copy of the specific supervisory plan. A Sample Supervisory Plan is available in the Church office to assist in preparing the specific supervisory plan. (See Part E, below.)

- No child or youth will ever be left unattended during, or following, a Parish activity.
- Clergy, staff members, and volunteers should not conduct unobservable meetings or interactions with children or youth.
- In a discipleship or mentoring relationship, the interactions should occur in a public place or where other persons are present.
- Everyone is tasked with watching for, and responding to, policy violations.
- An open invitation for parents or caregivers to visit at any time unannounced.
- A careful review of new programs and/or significant changes to a program structure.
- Keeping interaction with children in full view of others.
- Keeping unused rooms locked whenever possible. When not possible, those tasked with supervising youth or children should be particularly vigilant to make sure all of the youth or children are in the

presence of at least two adults who are not married to each other and who are in charge at all times, and that no strangers are present.

- Keeping children and youth in supervised areas.

The following restroom policy will be in effect during all children's programming:

***Children who require diapering:***

- Only screened and trained nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
- Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers; children should not be left unattended while being changed.
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.

***Children who are special needs or nursery aged and being potty-trained:***

- No child will be forced to toilet train.
- Only screened and trained nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children.
- When children are assisted in bathrooms the stall door will be left partially open.
- Preschool-aged children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
- Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
- Accidents should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing.

***Elementary School Children:***

- Elementary-age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. (However, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities.) A same-aged/biological sex-peer buddy system may also be used.
- Staff members and volunteers should take steps to avoid being alone with one child in the restroom. If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing his/her activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall.

When children are present in the sanctuary, parents or other legal guardians are encouraged to accompany their elementary aged child to the restroom or send them with an older sibling; we ask this knowing that restrooms are often the most likely place for abuse to occur in an institutional setting.

## **5. RESPONDING & REPORTING**

### **A. Responding to Concerns**

It is essential that the Parish respond to a report or instance of abuse in a manner that promotes healing for the survivor/victim, the person accused of abuse, and the loved ones of both parties, as well as healing in the local parish and community. A Draft Sample Response Plan is included in Part D of these Policies and Procedures. More detailed information is contained in the Caring for the Community Resources document available in the Church office. (See Part E, below.)

If a child discloses abuse, remember to:

- Respect the child's privacy by finding a private, non-threatening place to talk.
- Ask a staff member or trained volunteer to join in listening to the child or youth's account, if possible.
- Keep calm, listen, and avoid expressing shock or outrage.
- Let the child or youth know that he or she is understood.
- Assure the child or youth that the abuse was not his or her fault.
- Tell the child or youth, if helpful, that they were brave to disclose. Avoid questions that could make the child or youth feel responsible or plant ideas that could taint their recollection and account; child survivors/victims are often vague in their initial disclosure.
- Write down as accurately as possible what the child or youth disclosed; this information can be used in filing the Report of Suspected Abuse Form for the diocese and the Child Protective Services report if warranted. (See Part E, below.)
- Respect confidentiality: be careful afterwards not to discuss the information with, or in front of, other people who do not need to know what happened.
- Endeavor to ensure the safety of the child.

### **B. Reporting Concerns to Church Authorities**

Individual(s) reporting Concerns should immediately notify the Diocesan Reporter by one of the following three options.

- Call the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: 817-988-1941
- Email the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: [concerns@acnawest.org](mailto:concerns@acnawest.org)
- Complete the *Report a Concern Form* at the link below and the Diocesan Reporter will contact you:  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdkDvhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC\\_\\_ZODoXIPyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdkDvhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC__ZODoXIPyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform)

### **C. Contact with the Parents**

Following contact by the Diocesan Reporter, if the accused is not the child's parent or guardian or otherwise a member of the household, the Rector/Senior Pastor or his designee should contact the child's parents or legal guardians informing them of the Concerns and the steps being taken to address the Concerns. In addition, the Rector/Senior Pastor or his designee are to ensure the family receives



immediate and long-term pastoral care and are offered professional counseling from a counselor with whom they are comfortable and who is experienced in trauma-informed care. Also, consider assigning a member of Parish leadership as a liaison, who will be intentional about staying in regular contact with the family and walking with them through what will be a very challenging season. If possible, select someone who has a relationship with the family and ensure the liaison understands his /her role and limitations. As an example, the liaison should not provide counseling to the family but could help connect them with an appropriate counselor.

#### **D. Reporting Concerns to Legal Authorities**

Report Concerns to Legal Authorities, in accordance with applicable laws by calling:

**LOUISIANA CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE 1-855-452-5437** (available 24 hours a day).

The Children's Pastor or Rector/Senior Pastor will contact the child's parents or legal guardians and ensure they receive immediate and long-term pastoral care and are offered professional counseling from a counselor with whom they are comfortable and who is experienced in trauma-informed care. The Rector/Senior Pastor or his designee will advise the accused of the allegations, the process to be followed and his/her right to be represented by counsel and determine whether the accused will be suspended. The accused should also be provided pastoral care. Parish leadership will notify insurance providers and determine whether legal counsel will be retained and whether the matter will be investigated.

## C. 4-Step Approach to Adult Protection

### 1. AWARENESS

Adult abuse typically involves unwanted physical, sexual, psychological, or other actions that are intentionally taken to disadvantage another. Sexual misconduct includes a range of unwelcome and unwanted conduct including grooming; verbal, emotional and/or physical sexual harassment; sexual assault; and all forms of sexual violence.

### 2. TRAINING

This training is in addition to the required training for protection of children.

- a. All members of the clergy serving in a Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast (DWGC) parish and all employees of any DWGC parish must complete diocesan approved training on issues of sexual harassment, mentoring and colleague relationships, and sexual exploitation in pastoral relationship within 30 days of employment (or volunteering) in a DWGC parish. The training is currently completed online through Keeping Our Sacred Trust (<https://www.keepingoursacredtrust.org>). Every two years clergy must submit evidence of completion and recertification to the diocesan office.
- b. Every year all members of the clergy, all members of the vestry or equivalent and all staff members and volunteers must certify that they have i) read, understood, and accepted the Diocese's policies on the Protection of Adults and ii) completed diocesan-approved training on the Protection of Adults policy and Sexual Harassment Prevention.

The Parish is responsible to track and document the training/retraining of its vestry or equivalent, staff, and volunteers,

### 3. INTERACTING

All clergy, employees, and volunteers are encouraged to maintain healthy boundaries and to strive for emotionally healthy relationships. Each congregation's leadership is asked to consistently bring awareness to this issue by normalizing the following principles:

- **Choose the Light:** Whether it is porn addiction, gossip, an affair, bullying, sexual jokes or comments, flirting, etc., bringing the issue into the light is always the path toward healing, accountability, sanctification, and emotional health.
- **Transparency:** It is a difficult thing to clearly state what you think/feel/see happening, but it is a sign of emotional health. No one can improve or eradicate the inappropriate behavior without understanding the issue. Avoid triangulation and protection for individuals who are acting inappropriately.

- ***See something, say something:*** If something is a concern to you bring it to the appropriate leadership detailed within this document (for clergy that is the Bishop; for laity, that is the clergy at one's parish; for the Bishop, that is the Diocesan Chancellor); including multiple leaders in the discussion will ensure accountability, transparency, and appropriate resolution. The Diocese provides three options for the reporting of all Concerns:

- \* Call the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: 817-988-1941
- \* Email the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: [concerns@acnawest.org](mailto:concerns@acnawest.org)
- \* Complete the *Report a Concern Form* at the link below and the Diocesan Reporter will contact you: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKDVhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC\\_\\_ZODoXIPyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKDVhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC__ZODoXIPyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform)

#### **a. Pastoral Counseling**

During pastoral counseling sessions clergy and pastoral caregivers are expected to maintain an environment that minimizes any existence, or appearance, of potentially inappropriate behavior or exploitation.

The Bishop and any clergy involved in pastoral counseling should refrain from placing conversations regarding allegations of abuse or sexual misconduct within a sacramental framework (e.g. confession).

#### **b. Spiritual Direction**

If a partnership of spiritual direction is entered into long-term, consider these safeguards:

- Ensure this relationship is brought into the light among the leadership team of the Parish by informing multiple people of this partnership.
- If there are multiple people offering long-term spiritual direction in your Parish, consider meeting every quarter to discuss the process and its benefits to the Parish, as well as accountability.
- If one clergy person is offering long-term spiritual direction to another clergy person, bring the arrangement into the light by informing the Office of the Bishop of the relationship.
- Meet in a public place, not in one another's private living quarters.
- It is recommended that it be conducted by same gender participants.
- Follow guidelines regarding interaction and physical contact.
- Define the parameters of the relationship at the first meeting, articulating how one might discontinue the relationship without further explanation at any time.
- Communicate to whom the participant should report if they have any concerns (including the names and numbers of senior leadership, the Bishop, or the Diocese hotline).
- Include prayer and the study of Scripture in your regular time together.

### **4. RESPONDING & REPORTING**

It is essential that the Parish respond to a report or instance of abuse in a manner that promotes healing for the survivor/victim, the person accused of abuse, and the loved ones of both parties, as well as

healing in the local parish and community. A Draft Sample Response Plan is included in Part D of these Policies and Procedures.

#### **a. Reporting Concerns to Legal Authorities**

The Parish should be familiar with its State's laws and reporting requirements regarding abuse and neglect of the elderly and disabled adults.

In Louisiana anyone who has reasonable cause to believe a person 60 years or older, or an adult with disabilities is being abused, neglected, or exploited must report it to Elderly Protective Services, which can be reached by calling (833) 577-6532 or (225) 342-0144.

#### **b. Reporting Concerns to Church Authorities**

Individual(s) reporting Concerns should immediately notify the Diocesan Reporter by one of the following three options.

- Call the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: 817-988-1941
- Email the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: [concerns@acnawest.org](mailto:concerns@acnawest.org)
- Complete the *Report a Concern Form* at the link below and the Diocesan Reporter will contact you:  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKdVhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC\\_\\_ZODoXIPiyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKdVhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC__ZODoXIPiyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform)

#### **c. Contact With Survivor/Victim**

Following contact by the Diocesan Reporter, the Rector/Senior Pastor or his designee should contact the survivor/victim to ensure she/he, and her/his family, receives immediate and long-term pastoral care and is offered professional counseling from a counselor with whom she/he is comfortable and who is experienced in trauma-informed care. Also, consider assigning a member of Parish leadership as a liaison, who will be intentional about staying in regular contact with the survivor/victim and family and walking with them through what will be a very challenging season. If possible, select someone who has a relationship with the family and ensure the liaison understands his /her role and limitations. As an example, the liaison should not provide counseling to the survivor/victim or family but could help connect them with an appropriate counselor.

#### **d. Next Steps**

- 1. Contact With and Suspension of the Accused.** The Rector/Senior Pastor, or his designee, should advise the accused of the allegations, the process that will be followed and his/her right to be represented by legal counsel. In addition, the Rector/Senior Pastor should ensure the accused receives pastoral care. Such care should be provided by individuals other than those pastoring or counseling the survivor/victim. The accused should be suspended (with pay if a paid employee) while a confidential investigation is being conducted. This can be done quietly and should be done quickly and without exception. The Parish leadership will determine whether the accused will

continue in ministry. If the accused is a member of the clergy, such decision by Parish leadership must be done in consultation with the Bishop and in conformity to the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast.

- 2. Notification of Insurance Providers.** Unless the Parish's legal counsel advises otherwise, the Parish should promptly notify its liability insurance company.
- 3. Consideration of Retaining Legal Counsel.** The Rector/Senior Pastor, in consultation with the Bishop, will determine if legal counsel should be retained. Obtaining competent legal advice at the very outset of the matter may help protect the Parish's interests and be a helpful resource regarding any reporting or other legal requirements.
- 4. Designation of a Spokesperson.** Identify a single spokesperson to respond to media inquiries, someone who can communicate clearly and succinctly and with empathy and care.
- 5. Communication With the Congregation.** The Congregation should not first hear about an instance of abuse in the Parish from a news report or through the rumor mill. Consequently, it is important to have early and transparent communication of essential and non-confidential facts with the congregation. The communication should be succinct, factual, non-speculative and survivor-sensitive and, among other things, send a clear message that the survivors/victims are being cared for and that the Parish is a safe place.
- 6. Investigation.** The Bishop, in consultation with the Diocesan Chancellor, will decide whether or not an investigation will be conducted and by whom. The Bishop shall not participate in the investigation, which should be impartial and bias-free. The person(s) appointed to investigate the matter should not be employed by or a member of the Parish at which the alleged misconduct occurred or have any type of relationship with the accused, the survivor/victim or the survivor/victim's family. Any investigation should not interfere with or impede, in any way, any investigation conducted by state or local law enforcement.

## D. Draft Sample Response Plan

1. Appropriate actions and communications are generally fact-specific and depend heavily on the circumstances, including the types of allegations, the role (if any) of the accused, the involvement of law enforcement and whether any of the behavior is admitted.
2. The Parish's response should be survivor-sensitive, i.e., priority should be given to protecting and caring for the alleged survivor/victim and his/her family. However, it is essential that the Parish respond in a manner that promotes healing for the survivor/victim, the person accused of abuse and the loved ones of both parties, as well as healing in the congregation and community.
3. Document any actions taken regarding the complaint and retain that documentation in confidential files. Electronic documents, images and recordings should be preserved and saved on a secure, password-protected computer or cloud-server and all paper documents should be preserved and locked in a secure location. The Chancellor or Parish's legal counsel may have additional specific instructions for how such documentation should be prepared and maintained. No documents, photographs, recordings, emails, or texts that relate in any way to matter at hand should be destroyed or deleted without consulting with the Parish's legal counsel or the Chancellor.
4. If a child discloses abuse or neglect, the clergy, staff member or volunteer receiving the information (with another responsible adult if reasonably possible) should calmly and carefully listen to the child's account, ask non-threatening questions if needed and write down what the child discloses as accurately as possible. The information obtained from the child should be treated with the highest degree of confidentiality.
5. Individual(s) reporting Concerns should immediately notify the Diocesan Reporter by one of the following three options:
  - Call the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: 817-988-1941
  - Email the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: [concerns@acnawest.org](mailto:concerns@acnawest.org)
  - Complete the *Report a Concern Form* at the link below and the Diocesan Reporter will contact you:  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKdvhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC\\_\\_ZODoXlPiyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKdvhNv0WqiwnhGXdw4g19pCC__ZODoXlPiyRVZuM-8NZDrQ/viewform)
6. The Diocesan Reporter, in turn, will report the allegations to the Rector/Senior Pastor (who, in turn, should report the matter to the Bishop) and provide all notes taken during any conversations with the survivor/victim.
7. If the reported Concern warrants further action, the Rector/Senior Pastor should immediately contact the child's parents or legal guardians reporting abuse and ensure they receive immediate and long-term pastoral care and are offered professional counseling from a counselor who is experienced with trauma-informed care and acceptable to them. Also, consider assigning a member of Parish leadership as a liaison, who will be intentional about staying in regular contact with the family and walking with them through what will be a very challenging season.

8. Promptly notify your liability insurance company. Do not wait for the investigation to proceed before notifying your insurance company.
9. The Rector/Senior Pastor, in consultation with the Bishop, Chancellor, and insurance representative, should decide whether independent legal counsel should be retained.
10. Consult with the Chancellor for advice regarding compliance with reporting laws, and then make/file the necessary reports with the appropriate agencies as soon as possible.
11. Inform the accused of the allegations, the process that will be followed and his/her right to be represented by legal counsel and ensure the accused receives pastoral care. The accused should be suspended (with pay if he/she is a paid employee) while a confidential investigation is being conducted. If the accused is a member of the clergy, any employment-related decisions by Parish leadership must be made in consultation with the Bishop and in conformity to the Constitution and Canons of the DWGC.
12. The Bishop, in consultation with the Chancellor and the insurance representative, should decide upon the nature and extent of the investigation, if any, to be conducted and by whom. Neither the Bishop nor the Rector/Senior Pastor should participate in the investigation, which should be impartial and bias-free.
13. Identify a single spokesperson (someone who can communicate clearly and succinctly and with empathy and care) to respond to any media inquiries.
14. Have early and transparent communication of essential and non-confidential facts with the congregation. The communication should be succinct, factual, non-speculative and survivor-sensitive and, among other things, send a clear message that the survivors/victims are being cared for and that the Parish is a safe place.
15. Care must be taken not to interfere with any investigation by law enforcement or your insurance company, and to be sensitive to the fair treatment of the accused and the well-being of the congregation. Every effort should be made to ensure that all persons involved are treated with dignity and compassion.

## **E. Forms and Documents**

The following forms and documents are available in the Church office. For each form or document found in the DWGC Safe Church Policies & Procedures: Protection of Children & Adults manual, the Section where it is located in the Resource Appendix is shown in parentheses.

1. Acknowledgment of Receipt and Training (in-house form)
2. Volunteer / Paid Staff Screening Questionnaires (in-house form)
3. Sample Supervisory Plan (Section C)
4. How to Report Child Abuse to Child Protective Services (Section D)
5. Sample Form for Report of Suspected Child Abuse (Section E)
6. Caring for the Community Resources (Section J)
7. Sample Release & Permission to use Images (Section K)