



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

July 31, 2019

Diocese of St. Augustine Safe Environment Program

Though the Diocese has had a safe environment program in one form or another in place since 1998, I take this opportunity to re-promulgate and reiterate as official diocesan policy our current safe environment program. This letter supersedes my previous letter of July 31, 2018.

All elements of our diocesan safe environment program have been in place for some time. All of these elements are required by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth*, and the essential norms deriving from the Charter as revised in 2011. The essential norms, having received the *recognitio* of the Holy See, are particular law in the dioceses of the United States. In addition to children and youth, all dioceses in the Province of Miami also apply the protections of the Charter and Norms to vulnerable adults as defined in Florida law.

More specifically, the diocesan safe environment program consists of the following component parts:

– The background screening requirements for clergy, religious, lay employees, educators and covered volunteers. Here I want to emphasize that, when required, background screening must be cleared **before** the person assumes his or her position or begins volunteer service; there can be no compromises or exceptions regarding this aspect of our Safe Environment Program.

– The *Protecting God's Children* program designed to educate clergy, religious, employees, educators and volunteers in ways and means to establish and maintain a safe environment for children and youth. A 30-day compliance window is allowed from the background screening clearance date.

– The *Touching Safety* and *Children & Youth Personal Safety* program alternatives, designed to help children and youth to cooperate in maintaining their own personal safety. It is of vital importance that every child and every youth in our Catholic schools, religious education programs and parish youth programs be given the opportunity to take part in this critical element of our Safe Environment Program. **Here again, there can be no compromises or short-cuts taken.**

All of the above component parts of our diocesan program are in full compliance with the requirements of the USCCB's Office for the Protection of Children and Youth, and I direct that they continue to be fully implemented in each parish, school and agency of this diocese.

Finally, we will continue to evaluate all of the components of the safe environment program. Whenever changes are called for, or improvements are possible, we will strive to implement them expeditiously.

Thank you for your cooperation in this most important area of concern for our entire diocese.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estevez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine