



# MINISTRY SAFE FOR ADULTS

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Letter from the Bishop

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

To clergy, lay leadership, and our whole diocesan family,

Grace and Peace in our Lord Jesus.

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 our broken world, the vulnerable are often exploited. Statistics demonstrate that approximately one in four girls and one in six boys suffer abuse in their lifetime. This means that it is highly likely that our congregations are made up of men and women who have either experienced abuse or know a survivor/victim of abuse. Unfortunately, this is true for every denomination. In order to be light in a dark world, the Church must be different. 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 infirmed, 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.

This manual describes the procedures required in response to an event of sexual misconduct or harassment and articulates the policies that aim to protect potential survivors/victims. It is necessary reading for all parish leaders, including, but not limited to, all affiliated clergy, vestry members, all parish employees, and all lead volunteers/teachers for children/youth. The manual is also recommended to the people of the Diocese for comprehensive understanding of the issues involved with sexual misconduct and harassment and the ramifications of engagement therein.

“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. I am grateful for your ministry and commitment to this policy below.

## p 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 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 two years all members of the clergy, all members of the vestry or equivalent and all staff members, contractors 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.

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### 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.

1. Call the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: 817-988-1941

2. Email the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: [Concerns@acnawest.org](mailto:Concerns@acnawest.org)

3. Complete the Report a Concern Form [here](#) and the Diocesan Reporter will contact you.

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 withing 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.

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- 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 DWGC hotline).
- Include prayer and the study of Scripture in your regular time together.

## 4. RESPONDING & REPORTING

It is essential that each 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. Reporting Concerns to Legal Authorities

Every DWGC parish should be familiar with its State's laws and reporting requirements



regarding abuse and neglect of the elderly and disabled adults.

In Texas anyone who has a reasonable cause to believe a person 65 years or older, or an adult with disabilities is being abused, neglected, or exploited must report it to Adult Protective Services, which can be reached by calling (800) 252-5400.

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 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.

1. Call the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: 817-988-1941
2. Email the ACNAWest Misconduct Reporting Office: [Concerns@acnawest.org](mailto:Concerns@acnawest.org)
3. Complete the Report a Concern Form [here](#) and the Diocesan Reporter will contact you.

c. Contact With the 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 be intentional about staying in regular contact with the family and walking with them through what will be a very challenging season.

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Promptly notify your liability insurance company. Do not wait for the investigation to proceed before notifying your insurance company.

The Rector/Senior Pastor, in consultation with the Bishop, Chancellor, and insurance representative, should decide whether independent legal counsel should be retained. 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.

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.

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.

Identify a single spokesperson (someone who can communicate clearly and succinctly and with empathy and care) to respond to any media inquiries.

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.

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.

#### Caring for the Community Resources

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#### Caring for the Congregation

Incidents of abuse (whether abuse of a child or an adult), and the secrecy that often surrounds them, can cause devastating harm to the parish as well as to the survivors/victims. Therefore, where current or past abuse has been perpetrated by clergy, staff, church leadership, contract worker, or volunteer of the parish, the parish shall provide consultation to encourage the discussion of such incidents and to provide a means to facilitate healing within the parish. Section J.3. includes one suggested model of how this may be done: a congregational trauma debriefing model.

It is essential that each parish responds to a report or instance of abuse or misconduct in a manner that promotes healing for the survivor/victim, the offender, and the loved ones of both parties, as well as healing within the congregation generally.

Traumatic events have well-documented effects, both immediate and delayed. When a congregation experiences a trauma, the impact is likely to be expressed through symptoms such as:

- Loss of energy or feeling of paralysis.
- Distrust of leadership (often projected onto future leadership).

- Divisions within the congregation.
- Some group members feeling isolated and withdrawing from the group.
- Anger being displaced onto unrelated issues or blown out of proportion.
- A conspiracy of silence about the traumatic event.
- Despair about the congregation's future.
- Distorting responsibility for the event.
- Seeking a "quick fix" without thoughtful reflection.
- Difficulty making normal and necessary decisions.

All these symptoms could be carried into subsequent years unless the trauma is processed, integrated into the life of the congregation, and healed. A useful model for addressing and integrating a trauma is the "debriefing" model drawn from disciplines that do crisis counseling, such as emergency medicine, law enforcement, military science, crisis chaplaincy, and disaster agencies.

A trauma debriefing allows participants to integrate the reality of the event with their own responses to that event. The Model for Information & Trauma Debriefing Meeting set forth in Section J.3. is an effective means to communicate, process, and accept facts, allow feelings to surface, and then, through God's healing grace, head into the future unhindered by the past.

The Diocesan Office should be contacted as promptly as possible to obtain recommendations for professionals experienced with trauma-informed care and counseling.

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## 2. Guiding Principles for Healing in the Church

The following guidelines outline steps that can be taken to promote healing in the congregation:

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Contact with the Family. Before the process for healing begins, the Bishop or his representative should maintain regular contact with the complainant(s) and describe to the complainant(s) the procedures to be used for promoting congregational healing.

Privacy Concerns. The privacy of the complainant(s) must be balanced against the need for openness with the local parish. Insofar as possible, the identity of the complainant(s) and any details which may identify him/her should be kept confidential.

Providing Facts. The procedures shall consider that parish members usually know when "something is going on," and, in the absence of facts, rumor and speculation will grow.

Notifying designated lay leader(s). The designated lay leader(s)ship should be advised promptly of the issues, since that group's participation is vital in planning and implementing the processes for parish healing.

Trauma Debriefing. The healing and unity of a congregation are fostered when there is an open meeting, called an "Information & Trauma Debriefing Meeting," at which the Bishop or his representative presents as much factual information as possible.

Since the local parish will likely include people who have experienced abuse or misconduct themselves, appropriate personnel trained in crisis ministry should be present and available on a small group or one-to-one basis immediately after the formal presentation. Also, local mental health resources (including sliding scale fee agencies) should be publicized so that members of the congregation know how to find

these services. (Note that many communities have publicly funded survivor services.)

The debriefing should follow this process set forth in J.3. The message should be “The Church is a place for truth. We follow Jesus, who described himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

Parish Spokesperson. The vestry or equivalent, in consultation with the clergy, is encouraged to appoint a parish spokesperson. The congregation, including parish members and staff members, is urged to refer all media inquiries to the parish spokesperson.

Interim Priest. If the circumstances require that an interim priest be engaged, that priest should have special training in trauma debriefing. The interim priest should have regular opportunities to report and consult with the Bishop, his or her designated staff person, and counselors.

Consulting Legal Authorities. Neither the clergy nor any other parish worker should attempt to impede persons who wish to consult with legal authorities.

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Continuing Pastoral Care. The clergy and/or vestry or equivalent should consult with the Bishop about additional resources for the healing and care of the congregation.

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A Model for Information & Trauma Debriefing Meeting

The following procedures are recommended for the information and trauma debriefing meeting, but the parish and the Bishop should consult in advance with their respective legal counsel (and, if counsel recommends, insurance provider(s)) before conducting such a meeting or undertaking any such actions.

## Steps Prior to Meeting

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**Select Leaders.** Carefully choose a Congregational Trauma Debriefing team and a leader or co-leaders who have had experience with a debriefing or trauma-related process. It is important that the Rector/Senior Pastor or the Rector/Senior Pastor's representative be a visible participant in the debriefing, but not in the role of leadership.

**Schedule and notify.** Schedule the debriefing as soon as possible after the complaint becomes public knowledge. Ensure that all members of the congregation and parish staff are notified of the debriefing by telephone, email, overnight mail, or other fast and reliable method of notification. It is important to get a wide participation, so that all who experience the trauma also share the debriefing experience.

**Choose a Meeting Place.** Hold the debriefing in an appropriate place, preferably on the parish's property. Although an opening prayer is appropriate, this should not be a liturgical event.

**Address the News Media.** While the debriefing should not be confidential, it is important that no one be placed in jeopardy because of any disclosures made during that meeting. Therefore, it is preferable that the news media is not present for the debriefing but meet after the debriefing with the parish spokesperson and Bishop.

## Agenda for the Meeting

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**Open the Meeting.** The Bishop or his representative should welcome the attendees, as should one of the designated lay leader(s). The designated lay leader(s) then

should introduce himself/herself, explain the debriefing process, and outline the guidelines for the debriefing. It is important to keep the debriefing to the specified procedures. Leaders should be prepared for a lengthy meeting.

**Present the Facts.** Subject to the advice of counsel, the general facts and approximate chronology of the trauma should be presented verbally, supplemented by written notations such as a summary handout, or by writing notes on newsprint during the factual presentation. The goal is to ensure that all those present have a common record of the traumatic event. Note that this is not a time for feelings to be expressed, and the group may need some direction to withhold those feelings until the next phase of the debriefing.

**3. Solicit Reactions.** Once an appropriate record has been presented, the designated lay leader(s) should invite parish members to express their reactions to the facts. (Some parish members may need to be directed to express their own feelings and not those of others.) No feelings, however trivial, intense, or unusual, should be discounted, and no effort should be made to fix, soothe, or smooth them over. The responses simply are to be collected and heard.

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**Examine Repercussions.** Once reactions have been expressed fully, the leader should ask those present to turn their attention to the repercussions of the event and consider the congregation's future. This step bridges the trauma with the ongoing life of those involved in the trauma. It may be a time to explore some of the issues the congregation will face soon. As with the presentation of facts, the issues raised may be noted both verbally and in writing.

**Seek Context and Perspective.** Members of the congregation also should be invited to place the event within a context or perspective. There may be expressions of



confusion, helplessness, or curiosity about how other groups have resolved an issue of this type. In this phase, people may have an awareness of paradox and pose some hard questions such as the following. Leaders have discretion whether to respond, or to simply allow others to speak.

- Why do bad things happen?
- How can it be that such a talented priest/leader could be involved in misconduct?
- Why do things like this happen in a parish?
- Where does the responsibility lie?
- What about the resources of our faith?

#### Actions After the Meeting

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Plan. The final step is planning. This could include:

- Scheduling a follow-up session one or two months into the future.
- Discussing the ways in which the pastoral and sacramental needs of the congregation will be met.
- Describing the resources available to people who may need counseling or other specialized attention.

Provide Trained Counselors. For the immediate needs of those present, it is important that trained and trauma-informed crisis professionals be available in the parish building so that individuals or groups may process their feelings further. These professionals are present simply to listen and support people in integrating the trauma.

Debrief the Debriefing. After the debriefing, members of the Congregational Trauma Debriefing Team should meet to discuss their own experiences with the debriefing

meeting, to do the following:

- Plan the follow-up monitoring of the congregation in the future.
- Determine whether there are issues that will need further clarification.
- Determine whether there are complicating factors, or factors that require special continuing attention.
- Decide what the designated lay leader(s)ship of the congregation requires to address the issue further; and evaluate the debriefing meeting itself (or agree to do so at a later date).

#### Additional Responses & Follow-Up

If new information comes to light after the first debriefing, further meetings may be held.

Additionally, regular follow-up sessions with the congregation should be held during the first year after disclosure of the incident(s).

Additional appropriate parish responses may include:

- Regular prayer for the complainant(s), the respondent(s), and the congregation should continue.
- Preaching about violation of trust and liturgical acts of corporate penance.
- Securing a safe place for the complainant(s) and the complainant's family in community life.
- If incarceration or other punitive action follows legal proceedings, developing a means for the congregation to deal appropriately with the person who may be imprisoned.

#### Congregational Follow-up: The First Year

Even with the best of care, a congregation that has experienced sexual misconduct will likely need an ongoing program of support and assistance, especially in the first year. This year will be devoted to a healing process, in which the congregation slowly will integrate the reality of its experience into its future. If such integration does not take place, the congregation may suffer from prolonged loss of energy, despair about the future, loss and/or isolation of some

members, distrust of lay and/or ordained leadership or of the Bishop, and difficulty making decisions or taking risks.

Suggested congregational follow-up activities may include:

- Meeting with the Bishop. A meeting with the Bishop or the Bishop's representative and the vestry or equivalent to assess the healing process of the congregation.
- Staff Input. Obtaining input from parish staff (including an interim priest where present) about their observations regarding the incident and the debriefing process.
- Study Groups. Establishing study groups to consider the issue of healing from sexual abuse, perhaps by reading a selected book for discussion.
- Self-evaluation. Conducting a congregational self-evaluation, using a questionnaire or survey instrument.
- Focus Groups. Creating congregational focus groups to address the issue of where the congregation stands in its process of moving ahead.
- Committee on Congregational Life. Forming a Committee on Congregational Life charged with assessing the needs and planning programs for continued healing.
- Professional Consultant. Appointing a professional consultant experienced with issues of abuse to work with the vestry or equivalent and affected congregation on the components of the healing process.

Using the Trauma to Help Others.

Some parishes, having worked through a history of child abuse, take up a special vocation in a related area. Such steps signify that the congregation has moved into the redemptive activity of letting its own pain be a gift for others. Among possible actions:

- Helping Other Parishes. Offering help to other parishes confronted with the same issues.
- Sponsoring Programs. Sponsoring seminars or programs on ethics and sexuality.
- Parish Building Use. Offering the parish building for use by community groups to

address issues of child abuse.

- Developing programs. Developing specific programs for young people about protecting themselves from abuse.

4.

#### Pastoral Response to Known Sexual Offenders

The Church must make every reasonable effort to protect children. Special care must be taken when a parish interacts with a person who is registered as a sexual offender, or self-discloses a history of sexual misconduct towards children, or self-discloses a struggle with sexual attraction toward children.

When such a person is known to be a participant in the parish or its activities, the clergy shall inhibit that person from any contact with children and shall require (except as otherwise directed by the parish's legal counsel) the offender to sign a contract/covenant that details expectations, defines boundaries and off-limits locations (e.g. children's areas, acolyte vesting areas), and establishes appropriate supervision (such as, for example, a bathroom escort) for the offender while on parish premises and/or at parish activities. The contract/covenant must be approved by the clergy and church leadership. The parish shall have in place a plan to deal with any violation of the contract/covenant.

***O merciful Creator, your loving hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence, and give us grace to honor you with all that you have entrusted to us; that we, remembering the account we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. ©Book of Common Prayer, 2019, Prayer 22***