



DIOCESE OF ST. THOMAS IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

ADDENDUM TO THE THE CODE OF CONDUCT AND PROCEDURES CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF MINORS for use by Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious, Volunteers and Independent Contractors in the Diocese of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

Introduction. BUILDING SAFE AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE AND CARE FOR.

Serving and Caring for the People of God entrusted to us can be a fulfilling experience for all those involved in this relationship. Indeed, we can have a meaningful impact in the lives of those we meet in the context of our different ministries, not only because of the Christian values that we promote, but because we, Church people, are perceived as trustworthy, and as deserving respect and reverence. We are therefore invested with a position of influence that, unfortunately, can sometimes create unequal power conditions causing us to harm children or vulnerable adults without intending to do so.

This is the reason why members of the Clergy, employees, and volunteers of the Catholic Church, are called upon to frequently self-assess and monitor their behaviors toward the vulnerable of our communities that they are in contact with during their respective ministries or in the context of activities that take place under their watch. In this sense, the directive is unequivocal: It is your responsibility as individuals and as collaborators, to demonstrate that you are safe adults as you maintain clear sexual and emotional boundaries in your interactions, at all times, and under all circumstances.

Annex 1. MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Ensure that your ministerial relationships are transparent and healthy, time-limited, and only oriented toward attending the other's needs. Ensure also that you remain courteous and respectful, avoiding as far as possible close or intimate contacts with minors and vulnerable adults. You must never touch them inappropriately.
- Keep in mind that the impact of your behavior, on the people you minister to, is assessed by their perception, and by the perception of your environment, of what you do or say, and not by your good and pure intentions. Therefore, freely commit to be attentive to avoid all appearance of inappropriate or improper interaction, and aggressive or defensive attitude.
- Protect your reputation and that of the institution you represent, as you make sure to regularly evaluate your relationships in the context of your specific ministry, assessing how the way you conduct those relationships interfere with your responsibilities and assignments.
- Treat all equally, to the best of your ability, avoiding obvious partisanship or bias.

Annex 2. ENCOUNTERS WITH MINORS, YOUTH OR VULNERABLE ADULTS

- Meet with children and youth only in designated area, open to the sight and hearing of others, and never in secluded areas.
- Respect children and youth boundaries avoiding all physical contact with them.
- Never meet alone with children or youth when no other adult is around.
- Keep the meetings as brief as possible.
- Leave doors open.
- Refer to another counsellor or priest or volunteer if necessary.

Annex 3. ADDRESSING DISCLOSURES

This can happen that we cannot relay the content of our discussions with a child to the parents, especially when a difficult situation occurring at home is disclosed by a minor. Sometimes minors may disclose a personal struggle that they don't want their guardians or their parents to immediately know about. We need to be mindful that it is never appropriate to promise a child not to talk about a situation he or she shared verbally or electronically. When a disclosure happens, you are expected to:

- Play your pastoral role with patient listening and compassion.
- Serve as a bridge to the adequate professionals and officials, as indicated in your safe environment training, so that the minor seeking relief can share their story confidently and start healing.
- Communicate your concern to the Pastor, the Principal, or a Supervisor, if you are aware of a potential warning sign of inappropriate adult behavior.
- Contact the Civil Authorities and/or the Diocesan Child Protection and Safe Environment if you have strong suspicion that a child is being or has been abused. Contact information are available on the Diocese website: <https://catholicvi.com/>

Annex 4. ACTIVITIES, EVENTS ON OR OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL OR CHURCH PREMISES

The following measures remain in effect and are to be observed by all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers serving in schools, parishes, and other agencies throughout the Diocese.

- Ask another adult person to accompany you when transporting a child, unless your own.
- Ensure that at least two VIRTUS-trained adults are present with minors during activities, events, or excursions, taking place under the umbrella of a parish or a school.
- Never invite a child you minister and that is not your own, to ride in a car without another adult, and never without the written authorization of a parent.
- When organizing activities in your residence for youth and/or children that are not yours, always have at least two VIRTUS-trained adults present.

Annex 5. DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS - INTERNET

Digital Communication is an efficient tool to educate and evangelize our children. Therefore, interactions with minors via the internet need to be transparent, prudent, and professional.

- Employees and clergy involved in regular communications with minors must do so using authorized emails accounts accessible to the Pastor, Principal or Activity director. Contents of any communication with a minor must be open and transparent.
- Parents or guardians must always be informed of the interaction taking place.
- No picture of minors can be posted by you without the parents or guardians' authorization.
- Refrain from following or accept request for friendship from the minors you minister to as a priest, or a teacher or a counselor, on your private social media accounts.
- Communicate online with minors during a reasonable time slot. When necessary, schedule to send out messages at a given time instead of during inappropriate time or during nighttime.
- Always copy the parents in your communications.

Annex 6. DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

- At events involving minors and even young adults, be sober or do not attend the event while under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Use and/or possession of drugs, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, alcoholic beverages remains forbidden when children are present during an activity taking place under the umbrella of a school or parish.

Annex 7. TOUCHING

The following remains forbidden in your interaction with children:

- Engaging in any touching behavior that is sexual or may reasonably be considered sexual in nature.
- Kissing or using lengthy hugs or embraces or showing certain signs of affection or preference while in a secluded location.
- Spank or slap, wrestle, or tickle, play games like piggy-back rides, etc.
- Ask or give massages from and to children you serve or minister.

Annex. 8 PORNOGRAPHY

The following behavior is highly reprehensible:

- Acquisition, possession, and distribution of pornographic images of any kind while working with or ministering to children. Be mindful that acquiring, possessing, or distributing pornographic images of minors under the age of 18 is considered child sexual abuse.
- Use of workplace computers or other means of communications to conduct activities related to pornography.

Annex. 9 BE A SAFE ADULT AT ALL TIMES

As a church person, and a safe adult, always apply common-sense safety rules to all your endeavors, especially when your actions involve a minor. Consider in particular the following recommendations:

- Do not disclose to minors your private life or intimate issues.
- Never ask children to share secrets with you.
- Never discuss with the minors about other priests, religious or lay employees or volunteers.
- Avoid sharing your personal contact information with minors (phone, email...).
- Never invite minors to share your free time or be alone with you outside of the church or school premises.
- Never engage in dirty jokes in the presence of a child or a young person.
- Never engage in intimate relationship with those you serve or minister to as a priest, employee, or volunteer.
- Respect all children's boundaries.

Annex. 10 REPORTING VIOLATIONS

If you suspect that a church person (clergy, teacher, or volunteer) has sexually abused a minor or legally vulnerable adult, it is your duty to report to local law enforcement and then to the Victim Assistance Coordinator, the Vicar General and/or the Bishop.

If you suspect or observe any church person (clergy, teacher, or volunteer) engaging in grooming behavior or violating the Code of Conduct, communicate this information first to the person's supervisor, (Principal, Pastor/Administrator), then to the Victim Assistance Coordinator and/or the Bishop or Vicar General. For more information, contact the Diocesan Child Protection and Safe Environment Office.