

#METOO

Does your church have a policy addressing sexual harassment, bullying and abuse?

The #MeToo and #Timesup movements along with the allegations of misconduct in the six Pennsylvania Roman Catholic dioceses have led to the public's heightened awareness of and sensitivity to sexual harassment, bullying and abuse. Churches and their boards, employees and volunteers need to be prepared to operate in this new environment and ensure they are protecting those at risk for abuse, the interests of the church and themselves. The best place to start is to update or create an abuse prevention policy. This is not an easy task, but it need not be overwhelming.

When updating or drafting your policy, it is important not to be consumed by the procedural details. Focus on the fundamentals. Your abuse prevention policy should address, at a minimum, these nine components:

- Policy Statement - declaring the church (and its trustees, officers, directors, employees, representatives, volunteers and agents) is against sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and molestation;
- Definitions - Define sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and molestation so that all who read the statement can comprehend the disallowed activities;
- Screening - A requirement for regular background checks on all employees, volunteers, and individuals who come in contact with youths and at-risk adults;
- Training – require employees, volunteers and anyone who comes in contact with minors or at-risk adults;
 - These should be tailored to the specific role of each employee/volunteer.
 - Armatus has several modules that will be helpful for supervisors, employees and volunteers. Available through our website.
- Monitoring - Clear and concise prevention and supervision rules;
- Reporting Procedures - A clear and concise reporting system that does not obstruct nor dissuade anonymous reporters;
- Review Procedures - A clear and concise review system that allows for objective evaluation of every reported incident;
- Mandatory Reporter Requirements - An outline of which employees qualify under the jurisdiction's mandatory report laws (if any) and the time requirements for reporting;
- Consequences - Clear, concise and consistent standards for correction or elimination of undesired conduct should an employee, volunteer, or any other person be found to have acted in violation of the policy.

Insurance Board has several resources to offer when you decide to update or draft your abuse prevention policy. Visit the Safe Conduct Workbench at www.InsuranceBoard.org where you will find a sample policy, as well as information about background checks and training offered through Praesidium in partnership with the Insurance Board.