

Sisters of Life



Summary of Safe Environment Policy

INTRODUCTION

The Sisters of Life is a religious institute of women who promote the inherent dignity of the human person and seek to bring the truth and light of the Gospel of Life to pierce the darkness of sexual sin. As such, the Sisters are committed to providing a safe environment for all people entrusted to their care, most especially children and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation. To this end, the Sisters of Life have developed a Safe Environment Policy to guide each Sister and all the lay-faithful who work alongside the Sisters in their apostolic missions in prevention and timely reporting of all knowledge or accusations of sexual misconduct with minors.

In implementing this policy, the Sisters of Life are guided by the moral teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church, and also rely on the relevant provisions of civil and criminal laws and the *Code of Canon Law*. Moreover, this policy was drafted in the spirit of the *Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, which addressed the issue of clergy sexual abuse of children and young people.

This document merely provides a summary of the policy in order to make you aware of its existence. Please read and become familiar with the policy as a whole to help ensure the safety and protection of those entrusted to the Sisters' care in their apostolic mission. This document also provides you with a summary of the requisite Safe Environment training in order to work alongside the Sisters in their apostolic missions.

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF ME TO SERVE AS A VOLUNTEER OR CO-WORKER OF LIFE?

Every Sister and the lay-faithful who work alongside the Sisters of Life, whether as a volunteer, Co-Worker of Life, or employee, must complete the Safe Environment training, which is designed to offer education on how to identify, report, and protect minors from sexual misconduct. This training will be provided by the Archdiocese of New York Safe Environment Office or the equivalent office in the relevant diocese of the apostolic mission, and includes authorizing a criminal background check. The Sisters of Life ask that all lay-faithful interested in becoming a volunteer or Co-Worker of Life, work conscientiously with the Mission Coordinator responsible for ensuring completion of the training. Every employee, volunteer, and Co-Worker will also need to know and comply with the Sisters of Life Code of Conduct, especially if working directly with mothers and their children in the apostolic missions.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE?

The Sisters of Life desire that every volunteer and Co-Worker of Life know and discover the beauty of the Church's teachings on life and love. This is important because the Sisters of Life ask that all the lay-faithful working alongside the Sisters uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church as they serve in the apostolic missions, regardless of the religion practiced by the woman being served. To

this end, the Sisters offer formation programs and Co-Worker trainings to instruct on the charism of life and the beauty of the teachings of the Church on human sexuality. If you would like more information or to be part of a formation program, please inquire with a Sister.

HOW IS SEXUAL MISCONDUCT DEFINED IN THE POLICY?

Sexual misconduct means any actions or words of a sexual nature which are contrary to the moral doctrine and teachings of the Catholic Church and cause harm to another.

WHO IS CONSIDERED A MINOR?

Any individual under the age of 18; or, a vulnerable person, which means any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense.

WHO IS REQUIRED TO REPORT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND TO WHOM?

If any Sister, employee, volunteer, or Co-Worker of Life receives a report of alleged sexual abuse of a minor, they shall advise the person (or their parent or guardian) to immediately report the incident to the appropriate civil authorities, and should immediately inform the Local Superior or Mission Coordinator of the apostolic mission.

The Sisters of Life shall immediately report the incident to the state child abuse hotline and to the appropriate local police agency.

HOW WILL THE REPORTS BE HANDLED?

Reports will be handled with prompt attention, alacrity in reporting to civil authorities and investigating the allegation made, and reverence to all involved.

WHAT ABOUT THE ACCUSED PERSON?

The accused person may be advised to obtain legal advice. If the alleged claim appears substantiated, the accused person may be relieved from the exercise of any function, responsibility or ministry and/or employment in the Sisters of Life pending the outcome of the internal and any outside investigation. Any employee, volunteer, or Co-Worker of Life who admits to, does not contest, or is found guilty of an incident of sexual misconduct shall be relieved immediately from the exercise of any function or responsibility of ministry and/or employment in the Sisters of Life.

WHAT ABOUT FALSE ACCUSATIONS AND UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIMS?

There is always the possibility of false accusations or unsubstantiated claims made for whatever reason. Civil law provides penalties for defamation, in which individuals become victims of false denunciations and calumny. The courts often impose financial reparations in such cases. Canon law also makes provision for canonical sanctions in various cases of falsehood and calumny.