

Safe Environment Step-By-Step Guide

Revised 2023

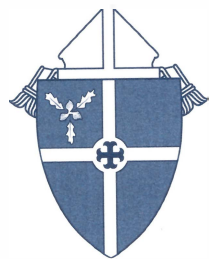
**An Annual Maintenance Tool
for Parishes and Schools**

“Promise to Protect - Pledge to Heal”

Established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



**Bismarck Diocese
Safe Environment**



DIOCESE OF BISMARCK

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February 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Since the bishops of the United States adopted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and the approval by the Holy See of the *Essential Norms* for all dioceses in the United States, we continue to be diligent in providing a safe environment in our parishes and schools for our children and youth. We pledge to continue this diligence and our vigilance regarding all the activities our Church offers them.

In our Diocese we continue to assure the protection of our children and youth by providing Personal Safety Awareness, Circle of Care and Child Safety curriculums as useful tools to continue to implement the *Charter* as required by the *Essential Norms*. We continue to publish articles in our *Dakota Catholic Action* about child abuse prevention.

In an effort to make the Safe Environment Programs easier to understand and administer at the parish level, we have compiled this step-by-step guide. Included in the guide are instructions on ordering background checks, providing training and the annual audit forms. The audit forms **must be completed annually** and sent to the Chancery **no later than July 1st** by each parish and Catholic school.

It is the personal responsibility of every Pastor to make sure his parish or parishes return the audits to the Chancery and that the audits are completed correctly and completely.

The task of protecting our children and youth is ongoing. We must continue to do everything possible to provide a safe and holy environment in our parishes and schools for our children and youth and for all the Catholic faithful.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck

Safe Environment Step-By-Step Guide

Our children are our most precious gifts from God. We must do all in our power to ensure that the children and youth placed in our care may worship, study and participate in activities in the safest and most secure setting possible.

In 2002 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This charter mandated that every diocese, parish and Catholic school in the United States create and maintain safe environment programs for children and youth which includes an annual audit to ensure compliance.

This guide is presented to assist parishes and Catholic schools to fulfill the requirements of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth* in an easy to follow step-by-step format. There are diocesan publications to direct and support the implementation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*:

1. Establishing Bonds of Trust
2. Safe Environment: Step-By-Step Guide
3. Bismarck Diocese Code of Conduct

4. Various Safe Environment Training Curriculums for Children and Youth

All documents found at bismarckdiocese.com

**IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION OR NEED ASSISTANCE WITH
SAFE ENVIRONMENT REQUIREMENTS, CONTACT:**

<p>Bismarck Diocese Safe Environment Office PO Box 1575 Bismarck ND 58502-1575 Phone: 1-701-223-1347 Toll Free: 1-877-405-7435 Fax: 1-701-223-3693</p>

7 Safe Environment Requirements

1. Employment & Volunteer Applications

- Employment application must be completed. Volunteers must be vetted thoroughly.
- Professional and personal references must be contacted.
- Employee and volunteer records must be maintained in a secure location.

2. Background Check Process

All diocesan, parish and school employees and volunteers whose duties include contact with minors must successfully complete the background check process BEFORE being hired and/or having any volunteer contact with children or youth!

- All diocesan, parish and school employees must have a background check, even if their duties do not include contact with minors.
- All diocesan, parish and school volunteers 18 years and older whose duties include contact with minor/vulnerable adults must have a background check.
- Employees and volunteers under the age of 18, must be visually and physically accessible by an adult supervisor who has been background checked. Do not order a background check for an individual under the age of 18 as they do not have public records.
- **Background checks for active employees and volunteers must be renewed every 7 years.**

NOTE: See the bismarckdiocese.com Safe Environment Background check page to find requirements for diocesan, parish and school volunteers.

BACKGROUND CHECK FORM (found at bismarckdiocese.com)

1. MYB, Inc. Criminal Records History Check Authorization

See bismarckdiocese.com for specific instructions.

MYB sends all results to the Diocese. Copies of the background check results are then sent to the parish/school. These results must be kept at the parish/school office in a secure and confidential location. **Never throw these away, as you will need them for the annual audit.**

3. Safe Environment Training for Employees & Volunteers

All diocesan, parish and Catholic school employees, volunteers and educators must:

- **Read the Bismarck Diocese Code of Conduct**
 - **Complete and Sign the Acknowledgement Form**
 - These documents are available at bismarckdiocese.com

 - All employees, volunteers and educators whose duties include contact with minors are required to complete Safe Environment Training before being employed or volunteering.
 - Need to be trained only one time.
 - **NOTE:** Persons under the age of 18 who are employed/volunteer (under the constant direct supervision of someone who meets all Safe Environment background check and training requirements) are still required to complete the Safe Environment training.
- Acknowledgement forms must be kept on file at the parish/school office in a secure location.
- Never throw these away, as you will need them for the annual audit.**

4. Safe Environment Education for Parents, Children & Youth

- Parishes are required to offer annual safe environment training for parents who have not yet been trained. In parishes where there are no new parishioners, it is not necessary to offer adult training that year because adults need to be trained only one time.
- Each parish and school is required to offer a yearly, age appropriate training session for children in parish religious education (CCD) programs, as well as in those the Catholic schools. It is highly recommended that parents be invited to attend these sessions.
- Curriculums are available at bismarckdiocese.com and contain age appropriate content for assisting teachers in making students aware of the many issues that involve their personal safety.

Be sure to keep a record of:

- a) Date and time of training sessions
- b) Names of students and parents in attendance
- c) Curriculum(s) used for the training
- d) Opt-out forms (found at bismarckdiocese.com) If parents choose not have their child participate in the Safe Environment Training, they may come to the parish or school office and sign the opt-out form that certifies that they have been offered training and declined it.

Keep all of these documents on file in the parish/school office, as they will be needed for the annual audit.

5. Catechist Training

- Parishes and schools are responsible for selecting a catechist/teacher who has cleared the Background Check Process, completed the Safe Environment Training and is comfortable with presenting Safe Environment lesson plans.

6. Annual Audit (Audit year is July 1 – June 30)

- All Parishes and Catholic schools are required to submit to the diocese an annual audit of compliance to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.
- It is vital that complete records are kept for the Safe Environment Audit which is conducted through the Office of Child and Youth Protection of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The following audit documents (available online at bismarckdiocese.com) are to be sent to the Chancery no later than July 1 each year:

1. **Letter** to the diocesan bishop indicating compliance signed by pastor/principal
2. **Parish/Catholic School Worksheet** (documents student Safe Environment training as well as employee, educator, volunteer background checks and Safe Environment Training)
3. **Calendar of Training** (dates/times and curriculums used for Safe Environment Training)

Required audit documents are provided on bismarckdiocese.com to all parishes/schools each spring.

7. Reporting of Known or Suspected Cases of Child Abuse or Neglect

**Known or suspected allegations of child abuse of a minor
by an employee, volunteer, clergy, or religious
must be reported immediately to a law enforcement agency.**

To report suspected child abuse and neglect, call the ND Statewide toll-free Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Line 1-833-958-3500 available 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday (7 a.m.– 4 p.m. Mountain Time). A dedicated team of specialized CPS intake professionals will answer your call and gather all needed facts so local CPS workers can act quickly to protect children.

**Contact the Diocesan Chancellor, Bismarck Diocese,
PO Box 1575, Bismarck, ND 58502-1575 or 1-877-405-7435 or
701-223-1347 to file a formal complaint to the diocese. The complaint form may also
be found at bismarckdiocese.com on the Victim Assistance page.**

**Victim Assistance Services are available by contacting the
Victim Assistance Coordinator, victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com or
1-877-405-7435 or 701-223-1347.**

**Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service - see bismarckdiocese.com
for assistance in reporting sexual abuse and related misconduct by bishops.**

This page is for parish/school use only.
These questions provide insight into the general scope of
information that the USCCB requires.

1. Does your parish/school have an on-going Safe Environment training program for the following groups?
* Minors * Parents * Employees
* Volunteers * Educators
2. Does your parish/school have an official letter (letter on diocesan letterhead) from the diocesan bishop promulgating the Safe Environment program? (There is a letter included in this document.)
3. Does your parish/school have an on-going program of background checks for employees and volunteers who have contact with minors? Are the reports on file in a confidential, secure location?
4. Does your parish/school have on file a letter signed by the pastor and addressed to the bishop that the parish/ school has complied with the Safe Environment program requirements?
5. Does your parish/school have a calendar of training for the current audit period?
6. Does your parish/school have its curricula and training materials readily available for review by an auditor? These will have to be made available to the Safe Environment auditor upon request.
7. Has your parish/school provided the diocese the information on the number of times & places where safe environment training has occurred during this audit year?
8. Has your parish/school provided the diocese with the number of people in each of the groups (minors, parents, employees, volunteers and educators) and the number who have received training on the prevention of sexual abuse of minors? This information is reported to the diocese on the *Safe Environment Parish Worksheet* and the *Safe Environment Catholic School Worksheet*.
9. Does your parish/school have Safe Environment Training Code of Conduct Acknowledgement Forms on file?
10. Does your parish/school have the forms on file signed by those parents/guardians who have received the training materials, but have opted out of the training program for their children? These forms must be available in your office for possible review.
11. Do your parish/school staff and volunteers know where to find the complaint form for alleging sexual abuse of a minor? See Victim Assistance page on bismarckdiocese.com.
12. Do your parish/school staff and volunteers know to what agencies allegations of sexual abuse must be reported? Refer to page 5 of this Step-by-Step guide or Victim Assistance page on bismarckdiocese.com for details.
13. Does your parish/school have a Safe Environment Coordinator? Please note that the name and contact information of the Safe Environment Coordinator must be on file at the Bismarck Diocese. Please contact 701-223-1347 or Toll-Free: 1-877-405-7435 with this information.

BISMARCK DIOCESE

Safe Environment Timeline for Parishes & Catholic Schools

August/ September	<p><u>New</u> teachers, employees and volunteers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have a background check. • Must have completed Safe Environment training by reading Code of Conduct and signing Acknowledgement Form (see Bismarck Diocese website) • <i>Cannot have contact with minors until both the background check and the training are completed</i>
October/November/ December/January/ February/ March/ April	<p>Students in grades PK-12 who attend either parish religious education programs or Catholic schools must have annual training in child abuse prevention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bismarck Diocese has made various age-appropriate curriculums for Preschool through 12th grade, available at bismarckdiocese.com <p><i>*Any new teachers, employees and volunteers beginning employment or volunteering during these months must have a background check and Safe Environment training!</i></p>
May/ June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLETE the Parish Worksheet and /or Catholic School Worksheet. <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLETE the Calendar of Training. <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLETE the Letter to the Bishop indicating compliance from the parish or school. This letter must be on letterhead <u>signed</u> by the pastor of the parish(es) or superintendent/principal of the school(s). <input type="checkbox"/> <u>ALL 3 above forms must be sent to the Chancery by JULY 1.</u>
July	<p>Work with the Safe Environment Office at the Chancery to take care of any deficiencies prior to the auditors visit.</p>