



Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

December 8, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

After considerable conversation with your pastor, and upon the recommendation of the Diocesan Review Board, I am writing to inform you that Father Joseph Metzger has agreed to take a leave of absence as pastor of Blessed Sacrament parish due to complaints received by our Safe Environment Office concerning his interactions with young people. Let me be clear that no allegations of child sexual abuse have been made. However, the interactions complained of are not in keeping with the Code of Conduct with Minors set forth in the Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations.

I am assigning the Very Reverend W. Daniel Beeman, V.F. as temporary administrator to oversee the pastoral care and administration of the parish during this time.

Also, during this period, careful assessment and consultation will occur with the Diocesan Review Board and the priest personnel board regarding suitability for return to active ministry and in what capacity.

Please be assured of my daily prayers for your parish community and for Father Metzger. May the blessings of Almighty God be with you and your families during this Advent season as we await the renewed coming of Christ our Hope.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most. Rev. Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond

V. Code of Conduct with Minors

The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to provide a safe environment for the children, youth and vulnerable adults in the faith communities in the Diocese of Richmond. All Church personnel as well as volunteers routinely working with minors and vulnerable adults should attend a safe environment training session and complete the diocesan background screening process. Church, school personnel, and all volunteers who work with or routinely have access to minors and vulnerable adults must be aware of their own as well as others' vulnerability when working alone with minors and vulnerable adults. For this reason, the Diocese of Richmond will utilize a team approach.

1. Monitor facilities during any parish, school or diocesan events, particularly any restroom facilities used by children and youth and any secluded areas.
2. Two unrelated adults who have completed safe environment training and background screening must be present during parish, school or diocesan activities, whether it is a residence, meeting hall, rectory, or any other closed or private location.
3. Programs for children/youth shall be approved by parish, school, or diocesan administration and staffed by at least two unrelated adults. Any off-site event must be chaperoned by at least two unrelated adults.
4. Transportation provided while on parish- school- or diocesan-sponsored events, require the presence of two adults, unrelated, in the vehicle while children or youth are being transported. When it is not possible to provide two adults for each vehicle, the minimum requirement is one adult with two or more youth members, never one adult to one child.
5. Overnight retreats/events require the presence of two unrelated adults. Staff and volunteers should not provide shared, private, overnight accommodations for individual young people in a Church –owned facility, private residence or hotel room where there is no other adult supervision present. All adults must respect the privacy of minors in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers, intruding only the extent that health and safety requires.
6. Adults should be aware that physical contact with minors can be easily misconstrued, especially in private settings. Physical contact with minors should be public, appropriate and nonsexual.
7. Parents have a right to observe programs and activities in which their children are involved. Parents, who desire to participate in or have continuous contact with their child's programs at school or the parish, must fulfill the requirements of the volunteer background screening process and safe environment training.
8. In those rare emergency situations, when accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of the child, youth or vulnerable adult; extraordinary care should be taken by the cleric, employee or volunteer to protect all parties from the appearance of impropriety and from all harm. When possible, a team approach should be used to deal with emergency situations.
9. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. Church personnel and volunteers should never engage in physical discipline for behavior management of a minor/vulnerable adult. Moreover, church personnel and volunteers should not humiliate, ridicule or degrade minors or the vulnerable.
10. Exposing a minor to sexually oriented or morally inappropriate materials is prohibited.
11. Church personnel and volunteers should never offer alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs to a minor nor should church personnel use, possess or be under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol or smoke or use tobacco when ministering to minors or the vulnerable.
12. Caution should be exercised in communication with minors through emails or the internet.
13. Church/school personnel and volunteers will report suspected abuse to the civil authorities and, in cases involving a church official, then to the 24 Hour Reporting Line at 877-887-9603.

Church/school personnel and volunteers working with minors and vulnerable adults should review the Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations to include reporting policies before beginning ministry. Any action inconsistent with Diocesan policies for the protection of children and vulnerable adults or failure to take action mandated by the Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations may result in the removal from position.