

## **The Why (and the How) of Safe Environment Compliance in Our Catholic Schools**

### **The Reason for Safe Environment Requirements**

Before we can talk about *how* we do Safe Environment, we have to understand *why* we have these requirements. This cannot be seen as a hoop to jump through, or as a temporary response to an isolated “bad time” in the Church. Safe Environment is an integral and essential aspect of how we do our work, and how we live our life, as the People of God. The Church is a community, and in a community, everyone is affected by the harmful actions of unsafe adults. So the purpose of our safe environment efforts is to reflect our commitment to provide both protection and hope to every member of our community, to bring light to the darkness so that there is nowhere for darkness to hide in our churches and schools.

The Safe Environment programs that the Catholic Church has implemented throughout the dioceses of the United States have as their aim to encourage a culture of awareness and responsiveness: assuring that everyone in every program knows how to recognize potential warning signs that a child is being abused, or that an adult is behaving inappropriately. And, if such warning signs are noticed, that everyone knows how to respond by reporting their concerns without hesitation.

### **Charter-mandated Day-One Requirements**

As implementation of the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, each employee or volunteer in any parish or school in the Diocese of New Ulm needs to meet three fundamental requirements at the very outset of their employment or volunteer service. These have been commonly referred to as the **Day-One Essential 3 Requirements**, and they are non-negotiable:

- 1) The individual receives the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Diocese of New Ulm (Administration: Diocesan 13) and formally acknowledges that they have received it and agree to abide by it;
- 2) The individual undergoes a criminal background check (through ISP), the results of which show no indication of past misconduct that would preclude their working with children or youth; and
- 3) The individual attends a live VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children* training session.

These three requirements are expected to be fully completed before the individual begins any work (employed or volunteer) where they will be unsupervised with minors.

(*As an exception*, a short grace period for the completion of 3) can be extended for a serious reason, and only for individuals being hired or volunteering for a long-term ministry: this grace period can extend no longer than 60 days, and would need to be assessed and approved on a case-by-case basis.)

### **State-mandated MN BCA background check for schools**

Additionally, and completely unrelated to our safe environment requirements, the State of Minnesota requires (Statute 123B.03) that all employees in schools, as well as all athletic coaches whether paid or volunteer, have “a criminal history background check from the superintendent of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension” (MN BCA).

In the interests of uniformity, Diocese of New Ulm policy (Administration: Diocesan 13.3) directs that the parish/school will pay the cost of all required background checks for relevant employees and volunteers, including those conducted by the MN BCA.

This same statute allows a school, at their discretion, to hire an individual and allow them to begin work while such a background check is pending, as long as the school makes clear to the individual that such a hire is contingent on the eventual results of the MN BCA background check, and that employment may be revoked if the results of the MN BCA background check would reveal cause for such action.