

Appendix B

GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION OF ABUSE OF VULNERABLE ADULTS

In conjunction with the *Standards of Behavior and Boundaries*, the following information provides additional guidance to those who minister to vulnerable adults.

“Recognizing that individuals with disabilities have a claim to our respect because they are persons, because they share in the one redemption of Christ, and because they contribute to our society by their activity within it, the Church must become an advocate for and with them.”⁴⁶ As advocates we must be aware of the unique circumstances of people with disabilities and all vulnerable adults, who live with higher risk to neglect and abuse.

This information is intended to educate church personnel about abuse and provide guidelines to follow for prevention, recognition and reporting of abuse when they encounter vulnerable adults in their ministry and apostolates. These guidelines will also serve to educate vulnerable adults in ways to protect themselves from neglect and abuse.

Although the following guidelines are modeled after the policies for the protection of youth and young people of the Diocese of Toledo and the Standards of Behavior, it is crucial to remember there are differences when ministering to vulnerable adults. Unlike minors, mentally competent adults have the right to make and live by the consequences of their own decisions, no matter how unwise a decision may appear to be. In addition, while protecting vulnerable adults from harm, one must ensure that isolation, segregation and discrimination do not result. Active participation of people with varying gifts and abilities is essential for the completeness of the Church community. Those who provide services, support, or pastoral care, however, should realize that such work always involves some degree of risk.

It is also important to note that disability does not equal vulnerability. Disability is a functional loss as a result of a physical, mental, or psychological impairment which significantly limits activities of daily living. Vulnerability cannot be assumed strictly on the basis of an apparent disability. A disabled person can be both the minister and the recipient of pastoral care, a victim of abuse and an abuser.

These guidelines seek to enhance the Church’s ministry to and with vulnerable adults and therefore further the integration of all people in the Church.

⁴⁶ United States Catholic Conference, *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities*, 1978, p. 3.

Individuals for whom these guidelines are of primary importance include, but are not limited to:

- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to homebound parishioners
- Facilitators for bereavement and other support groups
- Social outreach ministers
- Parish nurses
- Retreat leaders
- Jail and prison ministers
- Adult faith formation leaders
- Hospitality ministers

Pastoral Guidelines

1. Act in a way that reflects the teachings and values of the Catholic Church.
2. Speak and act with respect and loving regard for each person acknowledging his/her value and giftedness.
3. Recognize and respect every individual's cultural values, as well as their right to privacy and full participation in the life of the Church.
4. Recognize the importance one's role in the Church's ministry to vulnerable adults.
5. Use appropriate language, physical contact and displays of emotion. Do not engage in or encourage the use of offensive language, humor or media.
6. Be attentive to unusual or suspicious activity that suggests possible neglect or abuse.
7. If anything which appears to present a serious risk of immediate harm to any person is observed, treat it as an emergency and contact appropriate authorities.
8. Know to whom to communicate situations that cause concern, and report immediately to an appropriate parish or diocesan staff person, legal guardian or community agency.
9. Recognize the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication, especially with individuals with speech and language disabilities.
10. Always dress in an appropriate manner.
11. Obtain guardian's permission before transporting a vulnerable adult in one's vehicle or visiting in their home or yours. If transportation is provided on a regular basis written guardian consent should be obtained.
12. Abide by the Standards of Behavior as promulgated by the Diocese.

13. Never engage in any type of abusive or inappropriate behavior.
14. Never offer to, distribute to, or share with vulnerable adults alcohol, tobacco, controlled substances or sexually explicit materials (i.e., pornography [adults or of minors], sexual paraphernalia, etc.).
15. Do not attempt to provide counseling unless you are a licensed professional counselor.
16. Avoid situations in which you are isolated with the person in your care for an extended period of time.
17. Do not take photos of a vulnerable adult without their consent, as well as the consent of their guardian.