

**POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE  
OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE PERSONS**

**Marianist Family Retreat Center**  
*(February 2022)*

It is the obligation and commitment of The Marianist Family Retreat Center (the “Center”) to protect children and vulnerable persons from all forms of abuse.

This policy statement applies to Center employees, program moderators, volunteers and adult participants in all Center sponsored activities and programs.

Abuse, whether mental, physical or sexual, will not be tolerated by any employee, program moderator, volunteer or participant in any Center-sponsored activities or programs. Violation of this policy will subject the violator to disciplinary action, which may include, but is not limited to, dismissal from employment or ejection from the program. In addition, the violator may be subject to lawsuits and/or complaints filed with state and federal authorities, which may have serious legal and financial consequences.

**Definitions**

The following definitions are understood to apply throughout this policy statement:

**Child (minor)** is defined as any person under the age of eighteen (18).

**Youth Participant** is defined as a minor child under the age of 18, as well as high school students 18 years of age or older who are participating in a Center-sponsored activity or program.

**Adult** is defined as a person 18 years or older participating in a Center-sponsored activity or program as an employee, program moderator, volunteer, or participant.

**Vulnerable Persons** include all minors and any persons 18 years of age or older who, because of impairment of mental or physical function, emotional status, or the nature of the relationship to the staff member or volunteer in question, are unable or unlikely to report abuse without assistance.

**Physical Abuse** is defined as any non-accidental injury to a child or vulnerable person which results in or threatens serious injury.

**Sexual Abuse** is defined as any physical or visual contact with a minor by any adult or person in a position of power over the minor (including those under 18 who are assigned volunteer staff) for the sexual gratification of the adult or person. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, any form of child molestation, incest (if the abuser is a member of the child’s family), or child sexual abuse materials.

**Mental Abuse** is defined as inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts, e.g., humiliating, intimidating, or threatening. Mental abuse includes verbal abuse and emotional abuse.

## **General Policy**

The following policies are to be followed throughout the course of the program/activity, whether at the Center or in transit to/from the Center.

- a. At no times shall an adult (except in the case of a parent and child, legal guardian or responsible family member) be alone with a youth participant or vulnerable person in an unobservable/private location whether on or off Center property.
- b. During a Center-sponsored activity/program with multiple youth participants present, it is permissible to have one adult present as a moderator/teacher in an open observable Center meeting area with open doors and when other adults are in the building with ready access to the meeting area.
- c. If, at any time, an adult finds themselves alone with a youth participant or vulnerable person the adult is required to immediately return the youth participant or vulnerable person to their respective parent(s), responsible family member, legal guardian or adult group leader. The sole exception to this section is during the Sacrament of Reconciliation which shall take place in assigned reconciliation rooms equipped with glass windows in the door.
- d. Under no circumstances shall an adult participating in a Center-sponsored activity or program conduct one-on-one sessions with a youth participant or vulnerable person, which cannot be observed openly by at least one other adult.
- e. If ever necessary (which is very unlikely) to gather minors in small groups in a closed area, there must be at least two adults present at all times.
- f. Care must be taken, and procedures must be in place to prevent the use of the bathroom/shower facilities by adults and youth participants or vulnerable persons at the same time.
- g. Adults shall not sleep in the same room as youth participants or vulnerable persons, unless they are related (parents, siblings, or legal guardians).

## **Electronic and Social Media**

Adults shall not engage in communications with youth participants or vulnerable persons through the use of electronic communications or social media except as allowed herein. Social Media shall include all web-based communications applications (e.g. Instagram, Snap Chat, Facebook, etc.).

Wherever possible, communications through social media should be through the organization's official email, public page, or website. Direct communications between adults and youth participants involving social media shall be limited to matters that deal with the professional relationship between an adult and youth participant and shall include at least one other adult in the communication.

Parents should be informed that the use of email, texting, or other electronic communications with minors and youth participants is a standard part of ministry to youth.

Adults with profiles on social networking sites may not request to be friends with youth participants or approve friend requests from youth participants.

Care should be taken to maintain professional and appropriate boundaries in all communications. When posting to the organization's public social media page(s) or website both adults and youth participants are strictly prohibited from:

- Posting comments that are, or could be construed by any observer as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating
- Engaging in sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities
- Posting private messages between adults and youth participants
- Posting inappropriate pictures or inappropriate comments on pictures

### **Reporting & Disclosure Guidelines**

As a Center employee, program moderator, volunteer or participant in Center-sponsored activities and programs, you may become aware of physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, either through report or direct observation. The following guidelines are to be followed for reporting such misconduct:

- a. Any staff member, volunteer or participant having reasonable cause to believe that a minor has been subjected to abuse, according to NJ State law, must report this without hesitation to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (877-652-2873).
- b. In addition, reports shall be made immediately to the Center Director and/or the program leader.
- c. All reports shall remain confidential. No retaliation of any sort shall be allowed against a person making a good faith report.
- d. As soon as an allegation is made, the Center Director and/or the program leader are to follow the appropriate Civil, Center procedures, and Diocesan policies.
- e. Additionally, the Center Director must report the incident to the Pastoral Assistance Coordinator (see contact information below\*) at the Provincial Offices in St. Louis, Missouri within 24 hours of receipt of any allegation of abuse.
- f. Reports shall be in writing (by the witness, if possible) so the Center Director or the program director can ensure that all facts of the suspected abuse are properly recorded.
- g. Your responsibility as staff member, volunteer or adult participant is to recognize the signs of child abuse and to report such signs or actual acts of child abuse. Do not attempt to investigate the suspected abuse of a minor or vulnerable person yourself.

### **Verification Documentation**

All employees, program moderators, volunteers and adults participating in Center-sponsored activities or programs involving minor children, youth participants and/or vulnerable persons must acknowledge in writing that they have received a copy of this policy and agree to comply with the requirements set forth herein. Signed acknowledgements shall be kept on file by the Center Director.

Marianist Province of the United States

\* Pastoral Assistance Coordinator

**pastoralassistancecoordinator@sm-usa.org**

314.285.2322