

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PARISH CATECHETICAL LEADERS

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES:

“Those responsible for religious education and youth ministry/adolescent catechesis programs must understand they have grave legal responsibilities and everyone involved in the Catholic Church must understand that persons in religious settings do not enjoy the same right that persons in public settings have” (A Primer on Law for DRE’s and Youth Ministers, p. 2).

“Directors of religious education and youth ministers should realize that they can be held responsible for the actions of their staff members...doctrine of Respondeat Superior, let the superior answer” (A Primer on Law for DRE’s and Youth Ministers, p. 23).

“Despite its spiritual nature, the Church on earth is composed of imperfect human beings. Thus laws are needed, just as in civil society, to protect the rights of the people of God, and also to prescribe their responsibilities as members of the Christian community” (Rights and Responsibilities: A Catholic’s Guide to the New Code of Canon Law, p. 2).

THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RECOMMENDS:

1. Each parish will provide a handbook for catechetical personnel in religious education programs that conforms to diocesan legal policies.
2. Each parish will provide a parent/student handbook developed in agreement with Office of Religious Education guidelines to include philosophy, goals, and information pertinent to the program.
3. The pastor and/or his delegate(s) will provide in-service on legal responsibilities for catechetical personnel and all other concerned persons which includes a review of their legal responsibilities.
4. The Office of Religious Education will provide in-service programs and resources concerning legal responsibilities.

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GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- All parishes will have available to catechetical personnel adequate resources to assist their understanding of their legal responsibilities. Suggested titles are available from the Office of Religious Education.

- All handbooks for catechetical personnel will include
 - Catechetical duties.
 - Catechist signed agreement.
 - Diocesan legal policy statements.
 - Emergency procedures.
 - Health and safety.
 - Non-catechetical duties.
 - Parent/catechist/DRE communication.
 - Personnel policies.
 - Procedures in event of need for legal counsel.
 - Qualifications/Certification of catechists.
 - Sample forms.
 - Specific parish issues (e.g. philosophy, registration, fees, etc.)
 - Supervision of catechists.
 - Supervision of students.

- All handbooks for students/parents will include
 - Admission policies (non-discriminatory).
 - Discipline code.
 - Emergency procedures.
 - Extracurricular activities policies and forms (permission slips).
 - Health and safety.
 - Instructional objectives.
 - Parent and student signed agreement.
 - Parent/catechist/DRE communication.
 - Specific parish issues (e.g., philosophy, attendance, tardiness, etc.).