

**Policies and Procedures**  
**For Those Serving in (Parish-Based Youth Groups)**  
**Youth Ministry Programs**  
**Archdiocese of St. Louis\***



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of these policies and procedures is to assist those serving in youth ministry programs of the Archdiocese of St. Louis (“Archdiocese”) in order to ensure the safety and well being of those participating in parish-based Youth Ministry Programs, (i.e. Youth Groups). These policies and procedures (referred to as “Youth Ministry Policies”) specifically apply to all parish Youth Ministers who serve in parish-based Youth Groups, including LifeTeen Groups. These policies are not applicable to other Archdiocesan Youth Ministry programs such as Scouts, Sports and the Reap Team. The policies contained herein are a complement to the requirements of the Safe Environment Program of the Archdiocese and, as such, the Youth Ministry Policies are to be read in conjunction with applicable Safe Environment Program policies.

## 2. Goals of Youth Ministry

The three goals of Youth Ministry expressed in the “Renewing the Vision” document by the USCCB are:

- 1) To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today;
- 2) To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community; and
- 3) To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

## 3. Definition of Certain Terms

For purposes of these Youth Ministry Policies\*, the following terms are defined as follows:

**Youth Ministry:** ministry serving those who are 11-18 years of age and in middle/high school, as well as those over the age of 18 and who are still in high school.

**Youth Ministry Team Leader:** an individual, lay or ordained, who serves as the coordinator of a Youth Ministry Program. This may be a paid or unpaid position.

**Youth Ministry Team Member:** an individual, lay or ordained, who serves in a Youth Ministry Program. This term is not linked to age, but to role. This role may include activities which serve to evangelize and catechize youth, facilitate small group discussion, lead prayer, provide direction for an activity, welcome youth to the

ministry setting, etc. This term may include adults ages 18-20 assisting in supervision, and adults age 21 and over.

***Youth Ministry Teen Assistant:*** an individual between the ages of 14-18 who serves in a Youth Ministry Program to assist Youth Ministry Team Members.

***Chaperone:*** this term applies only to adults at least 21 years of age, whose sole role is to provide supervision. Those who are serving as Chaperones are considered to be Youth Ministry Team Members.

***Minor, young person, youth participant:*** these terms apply to individuals under the age of 18. Those age 18 or over, but still in high school, are to be treated according to Missouri State law, but they may participate in youth ministry programs as long as they are in high school.

[\*These policies in this document and the definitions in this section include, but are not limited to, LifeTeen programs and LifeTeen core members.]

#### 4. Ethical Standards and Policies for those serving in Youth Ministry Programs

All persons serving in Youth Ministry Programs are to do so in accordance with the Code of Ethical Conduct for Clergy, Employees and Volunteers Working with Minors, based on five principles of integrity articulated by the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry as essential to effective ministry leaders. Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall: (1) exhibit the highest ethical standards and personal integrity reflective of the teachings of the Gospel and will avoid even the appearance of impropriety; (2) at all times conduct themselves in a professional manner including developing and maintaining the level of professional competence commensurate with their ministerial duties; (3) witness God's love for every person by sensitivity, reverence, and respect of each individual with and to whom they minister; (4) be conscious of the unique power they have in relationships due to the trust they are given and the visibility of their witness and leadership; and (5) comply with archdiocesan policies with regard to the protection of minors.

#### 5. Requirements of those serving in Youth Ministry Programs

##### 5.1 Youth Ministry Team Leader and Youth Ministry Team Member

To be eligible to serve as a Youth Ministry Team Leader or Youth Ministry Team Member, an individual must fulfill the requirements of the Safe Environment Program of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and must attend an initial orientation session sponsored by the Archdiocese, to be held annually.

The parish sponsoring the Youth Ministry Program shall maintain the following documentation for each Youth Ministry Team Leader and each Youth Ministry Team Member serving in the parish Youth Ministry Program as required by the parish, or the Archdiocese.

- 1) a copy of a completed application form as appropriate;
- 2) two verified reference checks; (References should be checked prior to the individual beginning to serve.)
- 3) a letter from the individual's prior pastor that states that the individual is suitable and appropriate to serve in a Youth Ministry Program;
- 4) proof of a criminal background check;
- 5) a signed Code of Ethical Conduct For Clergy, Employees and Volunteers Working with Minors.
- 6) proof of attendance/successful completion of a *Protecting God's Children* program; and
- 7) appropriate documentation for those who may be in a position to transport youth participants

## 5.2 Participation of Young Adults (Ages 18-20)

Adults ages 18-20 can be a major asset in the development and implementation of a Youth Ministry Program. While persons younger than 21 years of age may not serve as Chaperones, they may serve in Youth Ministry Programs as:

- Youth Ministry Team Members
- LifeTeen Core Members
- Facilitators of small groups
- Retreat team members
- Assisting the Youth Ministry Team Leader with programs and special events (e.g. service projects, retreats, prayer experiences)

Those who are out of high school and ages 18-20, and who have met all Youth Ministry Team Member requirements, may assist in supervision at activities and events, but may not be solely responsible for supervision of minors.

The Youth Ministry Team Leader in each parish/archdiocesan office who is responsible for supervising the Youth Ministry Team Member should meet with him/her to discuss the role that the Youth Ministry Team Member will have in the program. A clear description of this role should be provided to every Youth Ministry Team Member.

Many young people who have been involved in the youth ministry program as a teenager have a desire to serve as a leader/Youth Ministry Team Member. This is a great benefit to youth ministry programs. To most efficiently utilize the gifts and talents of these young adults, establish appropriate boundaries and to give a distinct separation between youth participant and Team Member, those wishing to serve on the Youth Ministry Team after high school shall have at least one school year of separation (10 months) upon leaving the Youth Ministry Program, (unless there is a significant and compelling reason, approved by the pastor, for that person to be exempted from this requirement.)

- This time away not only allows the individual the time to grow and to be prepared as a leader but prepares the youth participants to see the once peer as now a defined leader within the program. Allowing this time gives a clear understanding of roles and boundaries for those serving on Youth Ministry Leadership Team. After the year away, the youth participant, now classified as a young adult, may apply to be a member of the Youth Ministry Team.
- It is encouraged that the time away from Youth Ministry Program be a time of personal discernment and growth, engagement in the church community and a deepening of the individual's relationship with Christ and His Church. Many opportunities, such as parish adult programs, college Newman Centers, Paul VI Institute classes, etc. are great ways to strengthen and grow outside of the Youth Program. The Youth Ministry Team Leader should assist the young person with this discernment.
- It is the responsibility of the Youth Ministry Team Leader, with the input and the approval of the pastor, to decide who may serve in youth ministry as a team/core member.

## 6. Pastoral care boundaries for those serving in Youth Ministry Programs

Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs must respect and maintain appropriate boundaries. Boundaries include professional, personal, ethical, ministerial and sexual boundaries.

### 6.1 Counseling and Referrals to Professional Counselors

6.1.1 When ministering to individuals who are encountering a time of crisis or difficulty, it is important to remember that specialized training and licensing are necessary to serve as a counselor. It is important to be clear that a person serving in a Youth Ministry Program is not a counselor, unless appropriately trained and licensed and specifically engaged by the parish to serve as a counselor.

6.1.2 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall acknowledge the limits of their own competence and willingly make referrals to professionals, as appropriate.

## 6.2 Disclosure

6.2.1 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs acknowledge that they serve as partners with the parents/guardians of youth participants and are to act as such and respect the decisions of parents/guardians. Transparency is an essential element to Youth Ministry Programs.

6.2.2 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs recognize a young person's expectation of privacy and shall honor that in a professional way. Privacy considerations do not extend to information regarding serious foreseeable and imminent harm to the young person or others. Examples of issues that would contravene a youth participant's privacy include abuse and threats to self or others. In these situations, it is essential to seek the appropriate resources for assistance for the young person(s) and family(ies) involved in partnership with parent(s)/guardian(s).

## 6.3 Private Relationships

6.3.1 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs are in a position of trust. As such, professional boundaries must be maintained. Persons serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall refrain from any private relationship with current youth participants. The Youth Ministry Team Leader's role, as well as the Youth Ministry Team Member's role should be clearly defined as a professional ministry relationship, not a peer relationship. Persons serving in Youth Ministry Programs must not use their positions to get their personal needs met.

6.3.2 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall refrain from any dating relationship, romantic relationship or sexual relationship with a current youth participant or with a former youth participant for a period of three years after the individual participating in youth activities becomes 18 years old.

## 7. Elements to follow in structuring a Youth Ministry Program

Working with youth requires vigilance and appropriate planning. The following is a list of elements for those serving in Youth Ministry Programs to follow when structuring a Youth Ministry Program. This list is not an exhaustive inventory, rather it is meant to provide guidance and may be revised from time to time in separate communications and updates directed to those serving in Youth Ministry Programs.

- 7.1 Prior to participating in a Youth Ministry Program activity/event such as retreats, off-site events and overnight activities (“Activity/Event”) appropriate consent, waivers and medical forms must be obtained. All Youth Ministry Program Activities/Events shall have appropriate supervision. Activities/Events require the presence of the Youth Ministry Team Leader and at least one (1) Youth Ministry Team Member for the first ten (10) young people; with a 1:10 ratio continuing thereafter. Overnight events require a minimum of the Youth Ministry Team Leader and at least one (1) Chaperone for the first eight (8) young people; with a 1:8 ratio continuing thereafter.
- 7.2 Prior to utilizing an image of a youth participant in any medium, the Youth Ministry Team Leaders must obtain a signed copy of the media release authorization as required by Archdiocesan Policy.
- 7.3 Each Youth Ministry Program must have a well-stocked and easily accessible first-aid kit. This kit is to accompany the group on any events off parish property.
- 7.4 It is preferable that all prescription medications be administered by a parent/legal guardian of the youth participant. Medications may only be dispensed by the Youth Ministry Team Leader or authorized adult in accordance with the written instructions provided by the parent/legal guardian.
- 7.5 Being under the influence of illegal drugs, alcoholic beverages, and/or mood altering substances, and/or being in possession of drugs (with the exception of approved prescription and non-prescription drugs), alcohol or tobacco products by any youth participant is forbidden and may result in disciplinary action. This may include dismissal from the parish Youth Ministry Program, even for a first offense. The decision as to the most appropriate consequence should be made in consultation with the pastor and should take into consideration the pastoral needs of the situation.
- 7.6 Accurate records of attendance for an Activity/Event must be maintained and Youth Ministry Team Leaders shall establish procedures to notify parents/guardians of a youth participant’s non-attendance at an Activity/Event for which the youth participant is registered or anticipated to attend. Parents/legal guardians will be notified if a youth fails to attend the scheduled Activity/Event or leaves the Activity/Event early. If there is any question as to whether this policy applies to a certain event, please call the Safe Environment Program Office of the Archdiocese for clarification. Attendance records are to be maintained for ten (10) years. It is encouraged that a sign-in sheet be used and maintained at all regular Youth Ministry meetings.
- 7.7 Youth Ministry Team Leaders must remember that their responsibility to and for youth exists from the time of arrival of the first youth participant



until the time of departure of the last youth participant from the Activity/Event or for any on-site meeting. Along with the Youth Ministry Team Leader, one Youth Ministry Team Member must be present at the location before the first youth participant arrives and must remain until all youth participants have left the function or parish premises, including parking areas. If it is not possible to adhere to this provision due an unavoidable circumstance and a Youth Ministry Team Leader or Youth Ministry Team Member finds himself/herself alone with a youth participant, it is the responsibility of the Team Leader or Team Member to position themselves in a public area where the adult and youth can be seen by others.

- 7.8 Youth Ministry Team Leaders shall not schedule an Activity/Event that involves a potentially dangerous activity and shall not schedule an Activity/Event involving water, such as swimming, canoeing, etc. without first seeking the approval of the pastor and reviewing in advance the activity with the Office of Risk Management of the Archdiocese.
  - 7.9 In life-threatening situations, local EMS must be contacted by dialing 911.
  - 7.10 Youth Ministry Team Leaders and Youth Ministry Team Members must be familiar with the parish's disaster preparedness plan and follow all evacuation warnings when facing various weather anomalies (hurricane, flooding, tornado, etc.)
8. Transportation of minors involved in Youth Ministry Programs

The Archdiocese strongly encourages the use of commercial transportation provided by licensed and bonded carriers for all Youth Ministry Program Activities/Events.

When this is not feasible and transportation is to be provided by a non-commercial carrier/vehicle, whether privately-owned or rented, the following policies and procedures apply:

8.1 Driver & Transport Guidelines

8.1.1 Appropriate completed and signed adult driver information forms for each person serving in Youth Ministry who wishes to transport minors must be submitted to the Youth Ministry Team Leader annually and kept on file for ten (10) years. This form is to be renewed annually.

8.1.2 The use of 15-passenger vans is prohibited. Cars, vans and buses must not exceed the passenger load. All passengers must have a seat; seat belt laws are to be observed at all times. All passengers must wear a seat belt at all times unless they are a passenger in a commercial carrier without seat belts.

8.1.3 No fireworks and/or weapons are to be stored, carried or transported in a vehicle at any time.

8.1.4 The use of alcoholic or other illegal substances is prohibited. Drivers are prohibited from the use of alcohol, illegal substances and legally prescribed substances that may cause impairment before, during and after providing transportation for a Youth Ministry Program event.

8.1.5 Smoking is not allowed in the presence of a minor or in any vehicle.

8.1.6 Drivers should be focused on driving. Any activity which could be considered a distraction is to be avoided while the vehicle is in motion. This includes, but is not limited to, electronic communication.

8.1.7 Drivers must conduct a head count upon arrival and before departing from any activity when transporting youth. Drivers must also do a visual check upon unloading to be sure that no young person has been left in a vehicle.

## 8.2 Driver Requirements

8.2.1 Persons serving as drivers for a Youth Ministry Program Activity/Event must have a valid, non-probationary, State of Missouri driver's license with no physical limitation that could in any way impair his/her ability to operate and drive the vehicle safely.

8.2.2 Drivers must have met all the clearance requirements for the Safe Environment Program, including the criminal background screening to ensure that drivers are suitable to transport minors. Youth Ministry Team Leaders shall coordinate with parish safety coordinators and/or the Safe Environment Office of the Archdiocese.

8.2.3 No one under the age of 21 may drive minors as a part of a Youth Ministry Program Activity/Event.

## 8.3 Driver Insurance, Registration and Vehicle Safety Information

8.3.1 When a personal vehicle is used to transport youth participants for a Youth Ministry Program Activity/Event, the person to whom the vehicle is registered is responsible for any passengers. The vehicle must be insured for minimum limits of \$100,000 per person, \$300,000 per occurrence per year.

8.3.2 In all cases, the Youth Ministry Team Leader is obligated to verify that all drivers have the proper insurance.

8.3.3 The vehicle should have a valid registration and meet state safety requirements.

## 9. Communications and media

“The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. The desire for connectedness and the instinct for communication that are so obvious in contemporary culture are best understood as modern manifestations of the basic and enduring propensity of humans to reach beyond themselves and to seek communion with others. In reality, when we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human. Loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our Creator.”

Pope Benedict XVI – Message for the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Communications

With the words of Pope Benedict in mind, it is necessary that we acknowledge the importance of utilizing the new technologies and the internet as a communications tool within Youth Ministry Programs. Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs must also ensure that they do so in a way which is faithful to modeling authentic discipleship and relationships founded in integrity. For purposes of this Communications and Media policy, the term “Youth Minister” shall include Youth Ministry Team Leaders, Youth Ministry Team Members and all those serving in Youth Ministry Programs.

### 9.1 Transparency

9.1.1 It is essential to the nature of youth ministry that parents/guardians are fully aware of all mediums being used to keep in contact with their young person for ministerial purposes.

9.1.2 It is important that youth ministry is not used to establish private one-on-one relationships with youth and the methods of communication utilized by those serving in Youth Ministry Programs must reflect this. The Youth Ministry Team Leader’s role should be clearly defined as a ministry relationship, not a peer relationship. Youth Ministers must not use their positions to get their personal needs met.

### 9.2 Parameters of electronic communication

9.2.1 All electronic communications from a Youth Minister to a youth participant shall be appropriate and professional.

9.2.2 Unless there is an emergency situation involving planned activities in the Youth Ministry Program, Youth Ministers shall not communicate with a young person electronically between the hours of 9:00 p.m.

(Central Time) and 7:00 a.m. (Central Time) unless it is a communication in the form of a group notification for program scheduling.

9.2.3 All electronic communication from a Youth Minister to one youth participant must include another person in a supervisory role, such as the Youth Minister Director, the Pastor or his delegate. Transparency is vital.

### 9.3 Social Networking Applications:

The policies contained herein do not supersede the Archdiocese of St. Louis Social Media Policy and Best Practices; they simply identify particular applications of those policies. All Youth Ministers are expected to be familiar with and adhere to these policies.

#### 9.3.1 **Personal** Social Networking Sites of those serving in Youth Ministry Programs

9.3.1.1 If a person serving in a Youth Ministry Program chooses to have a personal social networking site, e.g. Facebook, it must be seen as an extension of the individual and all content must be in keeping with the role undertaken by those ministering with youth.

9.3.1.2 Communication via social media for the Youth Ministry Program should primarily be conducted in a Parish Youth Group page or the like.

*A personal* social networking site can only be utilized for the Youth Ministry Program if it is conducted with full transparency, e.g. only wall-to-wall communication, group page communication, no private messages, and in keeping with the Catholic Faith.

9.3.1.3 A person serving in the Youth Ministry Program may not send “friend requests” to any youth participant, but may accept “friend requests” from a youth participant. Even though you may accept “friend requests”, all communication through social media must be absolutely transparent. Any type of communication done should primarily be through the established Parish Youth Group Page with secondary communication available only through wall-to-wall communication, or with the online “presence” of another adult such as the pastor or designated archdiocesan representative.

Responding privately through social media to a youth participant without another adult attached is prohibited.

#### 9.3.2 **Parish**/Youth Ministry Program Social Networking Sites

9.3.2.1 All network activity must be in keeping with the Archdiocesan Networking Acceptable Use Policy.

9.3.2.2 Any social networking site utilized by a person serving in a Youth Ministry Program to communicate about the program must be administered by the parish or the Archdiocese. This means that the parish or the Archdiocese has the ability to control the content of the site. Any such site shall be established as a “group page” or a “fan page” so that those serving in Youth Ministry Programs may not engage in exclusive communications with an individual through the social networking site.

9.3.2.3 No chat or blog features of any software may be utilized or created on a parish web page. It is essential that all posted content be first evaluated in terms of content and appropriateness – this is not possible with a widespread ability for individuals to add content.

9.3.2.4 Posting of links, photos, and events must be limited to authorized administrators.

#### 9.4 E-mail to minors

9.4.1 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall not use their personal e-mail account for their ministry work if a parish and/or an archdiocesan account is available. As appropriate, the pastor of the parish or a designated archdiocesan representative will provide each person serving in a Youth Ministry Program with a parish/archdiocesan e-mail account for ministry work. If the pastor or designated archdiocesan representative does not provide an e-mail account, then the person serving in the Youth Ministry Program may communicate with youth participants via their personal e-mail account, but they must copy a person in a supervisory role, such as the Youth Minister Director, the Pastor or his delegate.

#### 9.5 Text Messaging to minors

9.5.1 Those serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall not text message, that is, send individual text messages to minors, unless there is an emergency involving an individual youth participant. In these circumstances, if a person serving in Youth Ministry Program does text a youth participant, the parent/guardian of the youth participant shall also be notified.

9.5.2 Mass texting may be used as a form of group notification for issues such as changes in a program or general messages such as reminders about Holy day Mass attendance.

#### 9.6 Instant Messaging

9.6.1 Persons serving in Youth Ministry Programs shall not instant message youth participants.

9.7 Photos

9.7.1 Before a person serving in a Youth Ministry Program may utilize a youth participant's photo or video/image in any electronic media, the Youth Ministry Team Leader must have a signed Media Authorization as required by Archdiocesan policy. Use of photos on websites should be group photos and only the youth participant's first name shall be used to identify the youth participant.

**(\*These policies and procedures are intended for Youth Groups in parishes, including LifeTeen Programs. Youth Ministry in other Catholic Youth Apostolate Programs such as Scouts, Sports and the REAP Team have their own policies and procedures, applicable to their particular needs, in addition to the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Program requirements for all who work with minors. All other Youth Ministry Programs in the Archdiocese of St. Louis are encouraged to use any of these policies and procedures as "best practices" to strengthen their own particular policies and procedures.)**