

INFORMATION PAPER

Volunteers, “Covered” Volunteers, & Their Screening & Training Requirements in the Diocese of St. Augustine

I. **Who Is A Volunteer?** Volunteers are those persons who freely assist a parish or diocesan ministry, school, or any other agency of the Diocese of St. Augustine with their time and talents. Volunteers are truly the life-blood of the apostolic works of the diocese; we could not function without their invaluable assistance. Volunteers, by definition, are not paid any form of compensation. A church worker who is paid any form of compensation (other than reimbursement for actual out-of-pocket expenses) is not a volunteer.

II. **Who Is A “Covered” Volunteer?** Some volunteers are “**covered**” **volunteers**. A covered volunteer is 18 years of age or older, and is defined in the Province of Miami (all of the dioceses in Florida) as follows: “Covered Volunteer – shall mean any unpaid person who is engaged or involved in any (arch)diocesan institution or parish activity, **and who is entrusted with the care or supervision of:**

– **children** [*those below the age of 18*], or

– **vulnerable adults.**” [*“Vulnerable adult” is defined in the Florida Statutes as a person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection is impaired due to a mental, emotional, physical, or developmental disability or dysfunctioning, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging.*]

III. **Requirements for Covered Volunteers.** Covered volunteers must be:

– fingerprinted & background checked,

– **and if**, in the course of their volunteer activities, they are **entrusted with the care or supervision of children** they must also attend safe environment training in addition to the fingerprinting & background check. Safe environment training in this diocese is the “Protecting God’s Children” (PGC) program.

If a volunteer is not a **covered** volunteer, no background screening or safe environment training of any kind is required. For example, a reader or Eucharistic minister who serves only at Mass in a parish church is not a **covered** volunteer. Thus, except for the training associated with reading at Mass or administering the Eucharist, nothing more except the approval of the pastor would be required for such a volunteer.

A covered volunteer who works only with **vulnerable adults**, and **not with minors**, would have to be fingerprinted & background checked, but would **not** have to attend PGC. For example, one who volunteers to help out in a ministry to the elderly or disabled homebound **would** need to be fingerprinted & background checked, but **would not** need to attend PGC.

IV. **“Entrusted with the Care or Supervision of Children” – What Does This Mean?** There has been a great deal of confusion, both in this diocese and in many dioceses around the country, about what constitutes being “entrusted with the care or supervision of children.” Remember – if a volunteer is

entrusted with the care or supervision of children, he or she must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend PGC.

Merely being in the presence of children, or being around children in the course of volunteering does not constitute being "entrusted with the care or supervision of children." Even occasional, short-term direct contact with children does not mean that a volunteer has been entrusted with their care or supervision. However, periods of long or repeated contact with children could create the perception in a child's mind that the adult volunteer is in some way "in charge," even if that volunteer has not been formally "entrusted with the care or supervision of children." This is especially so in the case of younger children.

V. **Specific Requirements.** With this in mind, and desiring to err on the side of safety, the following specific requirements regarding certain covered volunteers will best serve the needs of the diocese as we seek to ensure a safe environment for our children:

1. **Catechists.** All volunteer catechists in a parish religious education program must be fingerprinted & background checked and attend a PGC class.

2. **Chaperones.** Chaperones, by definition, are entrusted with at least a small level of care or supervision as they carry out an oversight function. Accordingly, anyone who volunteers to serve as a chaperone for minors for even one parish or school trip, event or function with a duration of more than 2 hours must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend a PGC class.

3. **Classroom Volunteers.** Any volunteer who will be assisting a teacher in a classroom setting for more than a total of 6 hours in any 12 month period, must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend a PGC class. This applies to any classroom setting, including parish religious education classes. A volunteer who reaches the 6 hour limit and who has not accomplished these requirements will not be permitted to continue until the requirements have been accomplished.

4. **Sports and Band Volunteers.** Any volunteer who will be assisting in any capacity in a parish or school sports, band or music program for more than 3 hours in any 12 month period, must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend a PGC class. A volunteer who reaches the 3 hour limit and who has not accomplished these requirements will not be permitted to continue until the requirements have been accomplished. Examples of such volunteer assistance includes serving as a coach or assistant coach, or a volunteer band leader or music coach or teacher.

5. **Before or After School Program Volunteers.** Any volunteer who will be assisting in any capacity in a parish or school - sponsored pre-school or after school program for more than a total of 3 hours in any 12 month period, must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend a PGC class. A volunteer who reaches the 3 hour limit and who has not accomplished these requirements will not be permitted to continue until these requirements have been accomplished.

6. **All Other School-Related Volunteers.** Any volunteer who will be assisting in any other school - related functions or activities not mentioned above, and whose total school - related volunteer activity will most likely exceed 6 hours in any 12 month period, must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend a PGC class. Any such volunteer who reaches the 6 hour limit and who has not accomplished these requirements will not be permitted to continue to volunteer for any school - related functions or activities until these requirements have been accomplished. The pastor or principal may impose a more restrictive limit than the 6 hour limit if deemed appropriate.

7. **Volunteers in Any Other Youth-Related Programs or Ministries.** When none of the preceding six

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specific requirements apply, the following is applicable: Any person who volunteers to assist in any capacity in any parish or diocesan program or ministry which primarily serves or involves minors, must be fingerprinted & background checked, and attend a PGC class, if they will most likely spend more than 3 hours in any 12 month period in this volunteer activity. A volunteer who reaches the 3 hour limit and who has not accomplished these requirements will not be permitted to continue in the program or ministry until these requirements have been accomplished. Examples of such ministries or programs include: parish youth programs, vacation bible school programs, altar server training or coordination, "children's church" programs during weekend liturgies, Life Teen or similar programs, or diocesan or parish youth retreat programs of any kind, including confirmation retreats.