

DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO GUIDELINES FOR MINISTRY WITH THE ELDERLY AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

General Guidelines:

AWARENESS: Be aware of signs that vulnerable adults may not be caring for themselves as they should or may require additional community resources to assist them. Report criminal abuse or neglect to Adult Protective Services. Report all other concerns to the pastor or ministerial supervisor.

UNDUE INFLUENCE: Elderly or vulnerable adults may be very trusting of Church representatives. Extra caution must be taken to avoid unduly influencing such persons, especially in the area of financial giving. (Slide 34)

REDUCED RISK: It is preferable: (a) to meet with a group rather than be alone with an individual; (b) to have another adult present nearby when working with vulnerable people; and (c) to meet in an open, public space rather than in a closed, private room. An open door is better than a closed door; a door with a window is better than a solid door. (Slide 35)

SUPPORT/ACCOUNTABILITY: For support and accountability, make someone else aware of your activities and your whereabouts. (Slide 36)

SUPPORT/ACCOUNTABILITY: Schedule regular meetings with your pastor or supervisor to discuss minor concerns as well as the nature and progress of the ministry. (Slide 36)

CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality concerns require that you not disclose information and communications from those you serve **except** where required by law, where the communicating person has given consent for disclosure, or the continued well-being of the person or another person is in jeopardy if the information is not shared appropriately. (Slide 36)

SUPPORT/CONFIDENTIALITY: You may become concerned about the well-being of a person whom you are visiting but **not for a reason requiring** a report to civil or Church authorities. If so, speak to the pastor or ministerial supervisor about initiating contact with a family member of the vulnerable adult to discuss the situation and decide appropriate action. Keep in mind that conversations of this nature, although necessary, may be perceived by the vulnerable adult as a betrayal of trust or breach of confidentiality. Discretion is essential in these situations. (Slide 37)

REDUCED RISK (FINANCIAL): The diocese recommends that all donors contemplating significant financial contributions should seek independent financial and legal counsel before doing so. The elderly or vulnerable should also be encouraged to speak with family members before making any significant contributions. (Slide 39)

REDUCED RISK (FINANCIAL): Except where the purpose of the visit is stewardship or planned giving, ministering persons should not accept gifts or donations from vulnerable adults. Encourage the person to make any donations directly to the church if they so desire, rather than to you. If the person insists on giving you something while you are there, provide a written receipt. Explain that the Diocese will issue an official receipt at the appropriate time. You would need to follow up. (Slide 38 & 39)

REDUCED RISK (TRANSPORTATION): If any transportation is being provided by a ministering person, (a) the driver should complete Form E, providing relevant driving/insurance information; (b) the person receiving this service should provide a written consent form, available from diocese; and (c) a local family member should be aware of the travel. (Slide 40)

EXCEPTIONS TO GUIDELINES: These guidelines provide a safer backdrop for ministry. Please fully discuss with your priest or ministerial supervisor the risks of not following the guidelines before creating exceptions to them. Good accountability and creative safe alternatives benefit your outreach efforts. (Slide 47)

Guidelines for Home Ministry:

Keep the ministerial purpose of your visit in mind at all times. (Slide 41)

UNDUE INFLUENCE: Do not attempt to unduly persuade or influence, particularly if the person seems confused. (Slide 41)

UNDUE INFLUENCE: Never offer advice about medication or medical treatment unless that is your ministerial purpose. Avoid offering advice in any area in which you are not qualified, especially when that advice could have serious effects (e.g. electrical repairs, investments). (Slide 41)

RESPECT: Avoid arguing with or agitating the person you are visiting. (Slide 41)

RESPECT: Arrange visits in advance. Establish a starting time and approximate ending time, as well as a clear purpose for the visit, so the individual knows exactly what to expect. When another adult is involved with care, that person also needs to know the plans. (Slide 42)

REDUCED RISK: Do not agree to meet anyone in his or her home if you sense your personal safety might be compromised, or if you feel that it might be difficult to maintain appropriate boundaries. You might choose a coffee shop, the church offices, or some other public place. At the very least, take another person with you. (Slide 42)

RESPECT: When visiting shut-ins or those who are ill or struggling emotionally, be particularly conscious of how they are feeling and avoid overtiring them. Be respectful of people's time and do not overstay your welcome. (Slide 42)

REDUCED RISK: Stay in the most public areas of the home – the living room, family room or kitchen. Avoid entering a person's bedroom unless absolutely necessary (as where the person is bedridden) and unless a third person is present in the home. (Slide 43)

RESPECT/REDUCED RISK: Protect the personal space of both parties. Choose a seat a comfortable distance from the person to allow for easy conversation without physical crowding. Avoid sitting right next to the person on a couch or sofa. Do not invite, initiate, or tolerate any inappropriate physical contact. (Slide 43)

RESPECT: Ministering persons should never engage in any form of sexual impropriety with those whom they are visiting. Sexual impropriety includes all forms of suggestive or seductive speech, gestures, and behaviors, as well as sexual contact. (Slide 43)

REDUCED RISK: When first arriving at a person's home, assess the situation for anything that may be out of the ordinary. Do not continue a visit if a person is inappropriately dressed, is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or if the person or an animal on the premises acts aggressively. (Slide 44)

REDUCED RISK: If a person acts strangely and says or does things that make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, excuse yourself, document what happened, and report the incident to your pastor or ministerial supervisor. Do not stay in a potentially dangerous or compromising situation. (Slide 44)

REDUCED RISK/ACCOUNTABILITY: Make another person (secretary, spouse, colleague) aware of where you are going and when you expect to return. (Slide 45)

SUPPORT/ACCOUNTABILITY: If you become involved in a situation where a boundary of appropriate conduct is violated, or something occurs that is out of the ordinary or subject to misinterpretation, immediately report it to your pastor or ministerial supervisor. Document the facts about the situation. (Slide 45)

ACCOUNTABILITY: Persons who make in-home visits to the same person regularly should be especially cautious about maintaining appropriate boundaries and not offering advice in areas in which they are not qualified. (Slide 46)

EXCEPTIONS TO GUIDELINES: As noted above, these guidelines provide a safer backdrop for ministry. Please fully discuss with your priest or ministerial supervisor the risks of not following the guidelines before creating exceptions to them. Good accountability and creative safe alternatives benefit your outreach efforts. (Slide 47)

These guidelines help protect me and those to whom I minister. As an employee or volunteer of the Church, I will seek direction with concerns that arise in the course of this ministry. I understand that I am responsible for reporting known illegal behavior to legal authorities. I understand that any serious violation of these guidelines may result in my termination of employment, removal as a volunteer, and/or dismissal from a program.

Name _____ Date _____