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Bishop presents conduct code

Protects children, youth, vulnerable

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced a new Code of Pastoral Conduct designed to strengthen current diocesan policies and procedures related to the prevention of sexual abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The bishop presented information on the new 10-page code, which covers employees and volunteer workers, during a May 30 press conference at the Pastoral Center in Gates.

The code outlines behavioral expectations and spells out penalties for violations. Penalties range from verbal reprimand to dismissal, depending on the nature of the violation, circumstances and extent of harm. Diocesan employees and volunteers will be asked to sign statements indicating that they have received, understand and accept the terms of the code, which already has been shared with parish and school leaders.

During the press conference, Bishop Clark said the diocese will conduct criminal-records checks of all employees and volunteers who come in contact with children and young people. The checks will include verification of Social Security numbers to ensure identity, and will help determine whether a person is listed in a sex-offender registry, has any felony convictions or has a record with the Department of Corrections.

All diocesan employees — as well as volunteers who spend significant time with children, young people and vulnerable adults with mental disabilities or incapacities — are required to attend a two-hour code-orientation work-



Sam Zalacca, principal of Mother of Sorrows School in Greece, looks over Nicole Lagonegro's math assignment June 3 while she and other sixth-graders work in Pat Staub's sixth-grade classroom. The diocese's new Code of Pastoral Conduct calls for church personnel to use a team approach to activities for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

shop. This workshop is in addition to a mandatory six-hour session on sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation that has been required of all employees since 1993.

"These new initiatives will serve to further strengthen our efforts and help ensure that our children and young people are ministered to in a safe, loving and appropriate environment," the bishop said.

The code's standards include:

- Church personnel should use a team approach to activities for children, youth and vulnerable adults, and must not possess or use alcohol and or illegal drugs when working with them.
- Physical contact with chil-

dren, youth and vulnerable adults that is deemed appropriate should only occur under specific public circumstances.

- No cleric may provide shared or private accommodation for an individual child, youth or vulnerable adult in the cleric's private residence.

- Church personnel are not to provide overnight accommodations for individual children, youth or vulnerable adults when there is no other adult supervision present.

- Allegations of sexual misconduct must be taken seriously and must be reported to the appropriate person in the parish or institution and to the diocese.

- Workplaces must be free

of all forms of harassment, including physical and mental abuse; racial insults; derogatory ethnic slurs; unwelcome sexual advances or touching; sexual comments or sexual jokes; requests for sexual favors; and display of offensive materials.

- Church personnel should disclose all factors that could create a conflict of interest. For example, pastoral counselors should not provide counseling services to anyone with whom they have a business, professional or social relationship.

The bishop noted that the latest diocesan changes come with the approach of the one-year anniversary of the first

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Story by Rob Cullivan • Photo by Karin von Voigtlander