

ABUSE

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employment or denial of volunteer duty.

Pettingill acknowledged that such a strict policy is necessary in this day and age. "It forces people to confront the fact that sexual abuse is real," she said. "People think things like this can't happen — that it's out of sight and out of mind, and doesn't apply to me and my children. But it happens every day."

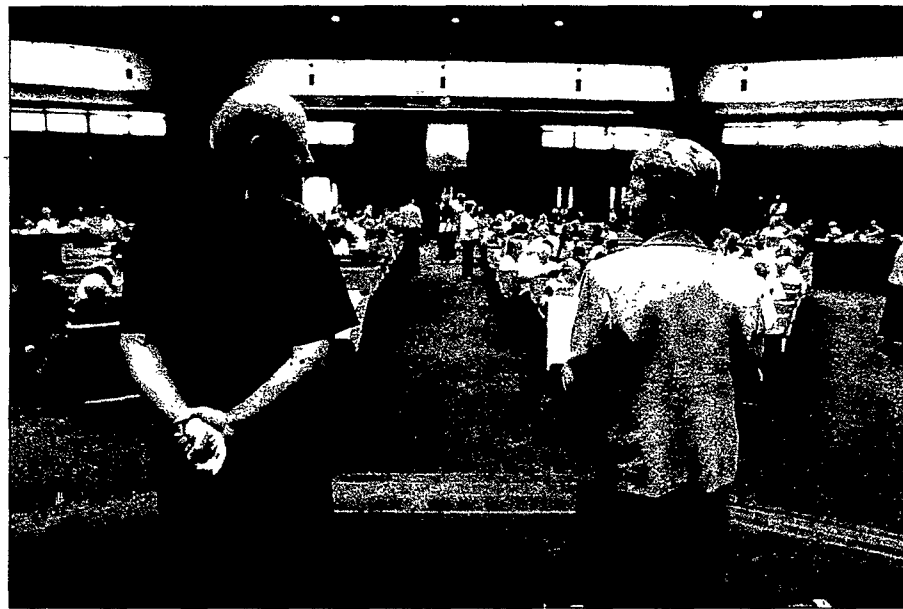
Nevertheless, she worries that the new requirements will affect her volunteer base, especially if she needs to recruit help on short notice but can't find people who already have gone through the screening process.

"It's hard to get volunteers to begin with, and now I'm having to go with these stricter guidelines. I'm very torn," Pettingill remarked. "If you lose your volunteers you lose your life lines."

DETAILED PROCESS

Training sessions for diocesan employees are being conducted by Barbara Pedeville, diocesan director of management and staff relations, and Father Robert Ring, pastor of Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community in the Finger Lakes. Since 1993, Pedeville and Father Ring have also served as the diocesan-appointed sexual-abuse victims' assistance coordinators.

The training sessions further define policies and procedures presented since 1993 to diocesan employees during mandatory six-hour



Father Robert Ring, pastor of Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community in the Finger Lakes, and Barbara Pedeville, diocesan director of management and staff relations, prepare to commence the Code of Pastoral Conduct training session at Fairport's St. John of Rochester July 8.

workshops — also conducted by Pedeville and Father Ring — on sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation. The new sessions address procedure modifications based on the Code of Pastoral Conduct in such areas as minimizing situations in which an adult is alone with a child; making physical contact only in appropriate public situations; and avoiding such forms of harassment as physical and mental abuse, and unwelcome sexual advances or comments.

Criminal background checks also are being explained to employees at the new training sessions. Employees are obligated to authorize an outside agency, the Rochester Business

Alliance, to verify the accuracy of the Social Security numbers they have provided to the diocese.

According to diocesan policy on screening of employees, all background checks are done confidentially, with an appointed diocesan human-resources person acting as a liaison between an employee and the screening agency. If the screenings reveal information that could affect the individual's employment, that person has a legal right to respond. The diocese also will conduct random checks in the future in an effort to protect against offenses that might occur after an employee has been screened.

Obviously, people with clean

records have little cause for concern. And even when a violation surfaces, it does not automatically mean termination of employment. "It depends on the circumstance and the offense," Pedeville said, although she emphasized that people listed on a state sex-offender registry cannot work for the church.

Although they are conducting their own staff and volunteer training, the Department of Catholic Schools and diocesan Catholic Charities also are adhering to the requirements of the new Code of Pastoral Conduct.

"Each school is looking at its own processes and procedures," said Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Carroll, the diocesan assistant superintendent for government services and administration.

Sister Carroll, who oversees orientation and training for school personnel, noted that the seven Catholic high schools in the diocese — although privately operated — still fall under Bishop Clark's jurisdiction and also must comply with the diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct.

For diocesan Catholic Charities, the code primarily affects employees and volunteers working directly with special-needs people who have such conditions as developmental disabilities, AIDS and traumatic brain injuries. Barb Poling, human resources director for Catholic Charities Community Services, noted that she lobbied to have the term "vulnerable adults" included as the diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct was being developed, even though the U.S. bishops' charter only mentions protection of children and

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SAFE ENVI

Yet the new

What happens if abuse is reported?

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The Diocese of Rochester's Code of Pastoral Conduct, issued May 30 of this year, stipulates the following procedure for reporting allegations of sexual abuse:

All diocesan priests, deacons, religious or lay employees working in a parish or affiliated organization are required to report to their superiors any allegation of sexual abuse committed against a child or an adult who is incapable of consent. This includes allegations involving church employees as well as abuses that may be occurring in the home. Bishop Matthew H. Clark is made aware of all reports of sexual abuse.

If appropriate, notification of alleged abuse also may be made to the diocesan response team of Barbara Pedeville, 585/328-3210, ext. 1215, or 800/388-7177, ext. 1215; or Father

Robert Ring, 315/730-0882; Pedeville and Father Ring also are contacts for individuals who feel they are, or were, victims of sexual abuse by church personnel.

All allegations of sexual abuse of people currently ages 25 or under are forwarded to legal authorities for investigation, according to Father Daniel Condon, diocesan chancellor. When persons older than 25 make allegations, they are encouraged to report them to the authorities, although in most cases such allegations would exceed the statute of limitations, Father Condon noted.

Upon receiving a complaint of alleged sexual abuse, the diocese engages private investigators who attempt to determine such facts as whether there is any corroboration of the complainant's allegations; whether there were witnesses to the abuse; and whether the alleged abuse may have happened to anyone

else, Father Condon said.

An investigative committee made up of three members of an advisory board to Bishop Clark would then review investigative reports before they were presented to the full advisory board. Established in 1993, the advisory board assists in the review of cases and makes case recommendations to the bishop. After discussing a case, the board would make a recommendation to the bishop concerning the allegation and the suitability for ministry of the accused, Father Condon said.

Current board members are Father Robert Condon; Father Alexander Bradshaw, pastor at Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in Greece; Andrew Meloni, former Monroe County sheriff; Bill Dillon, a former FBI agent; Thomas Roche, chief of police for the Town of Gates; Adrian Burke, an attorney; Margaret Joynt, an attorney and child advocate; and three

mental-health experts: Jeff Munson, Elaine Yudashkin and John McIntyre. Staff liaisons to the advisory board are Father Ring and Pedeville, along with Sister of St. Joseph Elaine Englert, diocesan director of Catholic school and diocesan recruitment, and attorney Richard Chapman.

After receiving the board's recommendation, Bishop Clark would send a recommendation to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Father Condon said the CDF would then direct the bishop on the course of action to be taken, or recall the case to itself. In certain cases, a designated course of action could be a canonical trial for the accused. Father Condon said, however, that he did not recall any sexual-abuse cases coming to trial in this diocese.

Contains reporting by Mike Latona.

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