

young people. Most clients of Community Services are adults, she explained.

"I think the entire definition of who needs to be protected needs to be explained," Poling said. "I appreciate the fact that Bishop Clark understands it's a bigger picture than just children and youth."

Based on the effort that's gone into developing the Code of Pastoral Conduct, Pedeville said she's confident the Rochester Diocese has met the requirements of the USCCB's charter and norms, and that this will be reflected in a Sept. 15-19 audit by the National Review Board. All U.S. dioceses are subject to audit by the board to gauge their compliance with the charter and norms.

Pedeville noted that this diocese had taken decisive steps to address sexual abuse long before the U.S. bishops' charter was developed. In 1993 the diocese enhanced its existing policy on sexual abuse of children by establishing the six-hour mandatory sexual-misconduct workshops for employees; creating an advisory board to Bishop Clark on sexual-abuse allegations; and appointing Pedeville and Father Ring as victims' advocates.

These measures have helped to establish healthy boundaries between adults and children in the diocese. Hugging is a common practice during diocesan teen retreats, for example — but not in private settings or in other ways that could lead to the appearance or possibility of sexual misconduct.

"You don't have to lose the dynamic of the personal experience. People know an appropriate hug and what's not," said Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Yet the new Code of Pastoral Con-

duct and its tighter requirements — especially regarding employee and volunteer background checks — has raised the bar, for many, to an uncomfortable level.

"Because it is new, folks have had a fair number of questions about the process," Father Ring said.

One area of confusion has involved the requirement that employees and volunteers agree to have their Social Security numbers verified. The forms required to legally authorize the release of Social Security numbers to the outside agency performing the check explain that the procedure is governed by the Fair Credit Reporting Act. Pedeville said the appearance of the word "credit" on these forms has led many employees to mistakenly believe the diocese would access their credit histories. In fact, Pedeville said, no actual credit checking will be done.

Father Ring said people may also resent the fact they must fill out



Deacon John Erb of Rochester's Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel parishes, voices concerns during a July 8 training session at Fairport's St. John of Rochester on the Code of Pastoral Conduct.

forms. But he said this level of detail all relates back to creating the safest possible environment.

"Think of what you would want for your children or grandchildren," he said. "It stands to reason if someone is driving my children, I'd like to know they haven't been convicted of a felony."

Father Ring added that questions

about the Code of Pastoral Conduct, as well as the time spent on orienting people to it, should trail off significantly as the year goes on. He said future training sessions will only apply to new hires and volunteers, as opposed to the current challenge of orienting all existing employees and volunteers. "Once we come up to speed this should be much, much easier, when we'll just be dealing with a few people at a time," Father Ring said.

Although the priest sexual-abuse scandal prompted the U.S. bishops to implement such far-reaching policies, ironically it is now the Catholic Church that stands to take a lead in addressing the broader issue of sexual abuse in society. For instance, the Rochester Diocese's Code of Pastoral Conduct requires all church employees to report any knowledge of an allegation of sexual abuse to their supervisors or the diocese.

"I now know the prevalence of sexual abuse is greater than I had ever imagined. We have an opportunity to address it," said Maribeth Mancini, who oversees such youth-oriented programs as religious education and youth ministry in her position as diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis.

"For society in general, this is an opportunity for parents and young people to know what the boundaries are," Pedeville added.

Implementing the Code of Pastoral Conduct also draws attention to an area that Sister Carroll feels has been overlooked — sexual abuse in the home.

"It's an opportunity to stop and look at the broader question of sexual abuse in society. Over 90 percent of abuse is by a family member and it is the silent issue," Sister Carroll said.

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