

Pastoral Response to Inappropriate Speech and Behavior

Saint Philip the Apostle Catholic Church is a sacred place of worship and a living faith community. Your pastor, assisted by parish leaders, is entrusted to provide a favorable environment for worship, ministry, education, service and fellowship. We support all persons associated with our parish who conduct themselves in positive ways consistent with our Christian mission.¹

Purpose of the Protocol

Inappropriate speech and behavior are not tolerated on the parish campus or at any off-campus sponsored activity.² The objective of this protocol is to affirm our core Christian values, identify modes of speaking and behaving that are offensive and harmful, outline actions available for leaders who are responsible for intervening, and provide a simple plan for communicating the protocol.³

Core Christian Values

As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to a higher standard: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” [Ephesians 4:31-32] Expressed somewhat differently, every person is deserving of a faith community characterized by peace and harmony.

Expected from all parishioners, whether children, teens or adults, is well-mannered behavior and speech encompassing the following core Christian values: Spiritual, psychological and physical wellbeing ; respect for personal privacy and possessions; and mutual esteem in the parish community.

¹ “Person” is intended in this protocol to be inclusive of children, teenagers and adults. St. Philip’s teaching mission embraces all parishioners and that which comprises a salutary and wholesome Christian life for each.

² As, for example, retreats, service activities, socials and various fellowship activities.

³ Our protocol is not intended to be exhaustive. A review of Church teachings (e.g. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*), archdiocesan programs (e.g. Virtus), established laws (e.g. State of Texas), or all that comprises *proper behavior* is quite beyond the scope of this short document. Nothing in this statement is intended to contradict Catholic teaching, Virtus or any other relevant program of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston or state law.

Inappropriate Speech and Behavior

In light of the above, the following kinds of inappropriate speech and behavior, *which Christians universally are taught to renounce*, will not be condoned ⁴:

- Infringing on an individual's reasonable expectation of privacy and wellbeing.
- Invading an individual's personal space with inappropriate and unwanted touching.
- Accessing or sharing provocative or disturbing material, whether digital or print, from a personal or commercial source.
- Conversing about one's own or another's sexual orientation, sexual history or making sexual innuendoes, overtures or propositions.
- Intimidating a person by "gossiping" (disparaging persons by rumor-mongering and reckless speech for amusement or scandal) OR "trolling" (indirectly or anonymously shaming, punishing, upsetting, or inciting persons often through social media) OR "bullying" (directly abusing a person by unwanted, offensive behavior and /or speech whether publicly or privately).⁵
- Falsely accusing or demeaning a person.
- Speaking with coarse, crude or outright vulgar language.
- Wearing clothing and accessories that could distract from or disrupt parish activities and decorum.
- Smoking or using tobacco products, committing alcohol or substance abuse or panhandling on parish property or parish-sponsored outings.
- Committing any immoral or unlawful act, acting threateningly or violently in any way, or committing vandalism.
- Disparaging our Christian religion, teachings, values, or leaders.
- Disobedient behavior by minor children toward adult staff or refusal to participate in appropriate scheduled activities.

⁴ Pastoral leaders cannot be held *responsible* for the actions and speech of any parishioner which occur off campus and apart from sponsored parish activities. As a consequence, however, appropriate steps may be taken to safeguard our campus environment and parish members.

⁵ Gossiping, trolling and bullying are all directed against a targeted person, often a child or teen. No matter whether public or private, occurring once or repeatedly, direct or indirect, these aggressive behaviors are *always* exploitative and dehumanizing and cannot be discounted under any circumstances.

Response to Inappropriate Behavior

In order to minimize forms of abusive behavior on campus and at diverse parish activities, St. Philip members, guests and visitors are expected to conform to the standards of the Virtus program of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston (see <https://www.virtusonline.org/>) and to the expectations of this protocol.⁶

When a member of a parish ministry or pastoral staff witnesses abusive behavior or overhears inappropriate speech or is reasonably certain that such behavior has occurred, the member will inform his or her lay ministry leader immediately. The ministry leader will inquire about the situation, informing the pastor promptly.

The pastor and lay ministry leaders, with reflection and discernment, will formulate a pastoral response in accord with this protocol and, if warranted, Virtus guidelines. The pastoral response will be implemented in a timely way for these reasons: 1.) to stop possible further abuse, 2.) to comfort and reassure persons who may be distressed, 3.) to educate an offending individual, and 4.) to strengthen the parish community.

Minor Infraction

A minor infraction is behavior or speech which clearly was not intended to be abusive or cause harm. A person who commits a minor infraction will be asked to meet with lay ministry leadership and /or the pastor for a private discussion of the incident, reminded of the expected behaviors, and counseled to effectively control his or her behavior. Documentation of the incident typically is not required.

Serious Infraction

For serious infractions (reasonable likelihood that physical or emotional harm has occurred and was intended in some way) OR *multiple minor infractions* which the pastor and /or parish lay leadership determine require further intervention:

- The pastor and lay ministry leaders will respond to an allegation of abusive behavior or speech with the intent of learning the truth about any serious incident, correcting or reproving as necessary, restoring peace and mutual respect, and making changes where needed.
- The pastor and /or lay ministry leadership will invite the parishioner(s) involved (or parents of a child or teenager) for a private discussion about the incident.
- The person(s) involved will be given the opportunity to speak freely.

⁶ All St. Philip parishioners, young and old, are answerable to the laws of the State of Texas (see <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/> and <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/?link=PE> etc).

- The person(s) involved will be reminded of our core Christian values and behavioral expectations expressed in the protocol and, if warranted, Virtus guidelines.
- If seriously disturbing or inciting factors are present,⁷ the pastor and lay ministry leadership may ask an individual to withdraw from parish programs, organizations, activities and ministry leadership.
- Serious infractions and their outcomes will be documented and kept on file in the parish office.

Pastoral Response Plan of Action

Because abuse in any form is harmful, the pastor and lay ministry leaders are obliged to do what is reasonable to provide a safe, peaceful, and reverent environment for all associated with St. Philip. Therefore our protocol will be published and made available to members of the parish community. The protocol will be --

- amended as needed to achieve clarity and fulfill its objective.
- introduced first in the Pastoral and Family Faith Councils, the Continuing Christian Education (CCE) program with other lay ministry and organizational leaders to follow.
- presented to other ministries and parish organizations whose leaders will be responsible for communicating its content to their members and seeking their cooperation.
- shared with the parish at large, periodically and in various ways.

An Appeal to Our St. Philip Faith Community

God's kingdom does not consist of a loose confederation of persons each satisfying his or her own self or interest group. To the contrary, the Spirit of Holiness calls each and every Christian to put on the "mind of Christ". [1Corinthians 2:16] We are intentional members of a shared community of Christian faith renown for its "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, (and) self-control". [Galatians 5:22-23] A faithful follower of Christ will "walk the talk" and conform his or her conduct and speech to our Catholic moral teachings and for the good of our Christian community.

Sincerely in Christ,
your Pastor and Lay Ministry Leaders. +++

⁷ As for example, a highly provocative incident, a serious infraction likely to be repeated, a situation scandalous to the faith community, an incident which must be documented in compliance with the archdiocesan Virtus program or requirements of the law, or when cooperation is not forthcoming etc.