

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 on 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 to our faith community, 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 dignity, 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 those things which comprises a salutary and wholesome Catholic Christian life for each.

² For example: retreats, service activities, socials, outings.

³ Our protocol is not intended to be exhaustive. A review of Church teachings (e.g. Catechism [CCC]), 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 our statement, however, is intended to diminish or contradict Catholic teaching or any 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 a person's reasonable expectation of privacy and wellbeing.
- Invading a person's personal space with inappropriate and unwanted touching.
- Accessing and /or sharing provocative or disturbing material, whether digital or print, from a personal or commercial source.
- Talking about one's own or another's sexual orientation, sexual history or making sexual innuendos, 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.
- Committing any unlawful act such as alcohol or substance abuse, or acting threateningly or violently in any way, or committing vandalism.
- Wearing clothing and accessories that could distract from or disrupt parish activities and decorum.
- Disparaging our Christian religion, teachings, values, or leaders.

⁴ Pastoral ministers are *not responsible* for the actions and speech of any person which occur off campus and apart from sponsored parish activities.

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 judgement that abusive, disturbing behavior has occurred) 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 a report of abusive behavior, pattern of behavior or inappropriate speech with the intent of learning the truth about such incidents, correcting or reproofing as necessary, restoring peace and mutual respect, and making changes where needed.
- The pastor and /or lay ministry leadership typically will offer the parishioners or guests involved (or parents of a child or teenager) the opportunity for a private discussion about the reported behavior.

⁶ All St. Philip members, guests and visitors 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 offered the opportunity to speak freely.
- The person(s) involved will be reminded of our core Christian values and behavioral expectations expressed in this protocol and, if warranted, the Virtus guidelines.
- If, for example, the pastor and lay ministry leadership determine that a behavioral incident is very disturbing, that cooperation is not forthcoming and /or the likelihood of further serious incidents is significant, a person may be asked to withdraw from parish programs, organizations and activities.
- 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 space for all associated with St. Philip parish. Therefore our protocol will be published periodically and made accessible to members and guests of the parish community in various ways. 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 periodically with the parish at large as an insert in the Sunday bulletin, featured in our parish website www.stphiliphuffmantx.org and in various other 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 apart from others. To the contrary, the Spirit of Holiness calls each and every Christian person to put on the "mind of Christ". [1 Corinthians 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 in light of our Catholic moral teachings and for the good of our Christian community. Sincerely in Christ, your Pastor

and Lay Ministry Leaders. +++