



To: Pastors, Youth Directors, Superintendent of Diocesan Schools and Parish Administrators

From: Brian Lemoi, Director, Evangelization and Lifelong Faith Formation  
Albert Vazquez Matos, Superintendent of Schools  
Ryan Phelan, Director, Youth and Young Adult Ministry  
Rick Osorio, Director of Insurance and Risk Management  
Andre Glaude, Safe Environment Program Manager

Re: **Diocesan Guidelines for Domestic and International Mission Trips**

**Effective Date: July 1, 2012**

In response to numerous requests for parish/Catholic school programs on conducting mission trips with youths participating in our faith and school programs, we are issuing the following policy as a resource in preparing for these trips.

**Mission trips are defined as follows:** Any team of adult and/or minors organized by a parish or school ministry, whose sole purpose is to travel domestically or out of the country, to offer spiritual, and/or practical assistance to a parish, school or people in need at a specified location.

### **Approval Process**

Due to the complexity in logistics and preparation for these events, it is important that initial plans/ideas first be reviewed and approved by the pastor or principal, and then the Faith Formation or School's Office, and then the Office of Insurance and Risk Management.

Once the trip is approved, final information and details should be passed on to the pastor, principal, business manager and parents.

### **Pre-planning**

This policy will address the logistical and planning portion of these trips. However, it should be mentioned that mission trips should have a theme and/or goal they are trying to accomplish.

One of the first items to complete is to research the area being visited as being safe and secure from war, crime, and disease. Please check with the local police department or Department of State, to confirm that the city and state (domestic site) or country being visited is approved as a safe one, especially for Americans. If the trip is approved, the

mission team should register with that country's U.S. Embassy in case an evacuation of Americans is imminent.

Other considerations to take into account are:

- Only qualified leaders should drive in the host country.
- A curfew should be established during the course of the stay.
- Participants should be in contact with locals only with a leader present.
- Cell phone/communications should be arranged and tested for emergencies.
- Participants and leaders should be aware of the geography and environment they are working in.
- These trips should not be led by leaders who have no experience supervising minors within the 14 - 17 age range. Leaders should be at least 21 years of age.
- Local organizations should be contacted to help provide set up information. If possible, the designated leader should make an advance visit to the area to assist in foreseeing any potential risks that may be encountered during the trip. Any foreseen or unforeseen problems should be properly planned for in advance. The safety and security of all the participants should be carefully assessed. Some items to keep in mind are are: Will additional security need to be provided on site? What is the distance to the nearest medical facility? What medical services are available? Will the participants require additional vaccinations depending upon the location of the trip? (An updated tetanus shot should be required).
- Create a plan of action to respond to any emergency. Even the worst case scenario should be thought through to plan a response.
- Confirm there are adequate facilities for housing all of the participants of the group in one location, including all the adult chaperones.
- If the trip is to a non-English speaking location, arrange to have someone that speaks the language travel with you to translate or hire a translator that can be on-site with you at the location.
- To reduce and avoid parental and legal concerns, it is critical that we advise parents in writing of all the details pertaining to the mission trip or service project. This would include but not be limited to the following:
  - a. type of work or activities they would be expected to perform.
  - b. cost (if any)
  - c. departure and arrival dates and times.
  - d. location and contact information where to be reached in case of emergency
  - e. names of chaperones
  - f. mode of transportation
  - g. accommodations
  - h. parent/legal guardian responsibility
- A waiver of all claims against the Diocese and/or parish for injury, accident, illness or death or by reason of the activity should be obtained from the parents/guardians of each participant under the age of 18. Please use the appropriate waiver and release, which also includes a medical release and health information on the minor participant.
- All individuals 18 and older also need to complete a waiver of all claims which includes a medical release portion.

- All adult chaperones must comply with the Diocesan Safe Environment Program Policies and Protocol. They must have a letter of certification from the SEP that each adult chaperone has a current FBI/FDLE level 2 background check and current SEP training certificate on file with the Diocesan SEP Office.
- Determine if any additional insurance coverage will need to be obtained. If this trip will take place outside the United States, all participants should check with their healthcare provider to ensure their coverage will follow them. If the coverage would not apply, arrangements should be made to acquire adequate health insurance coverage for the trip.
- Arrange a meeting with all participants and parents/legal guardians (if participant is a minor) to fully explain all details of the trip clearly and specifically as well as answer any questions they may have. Written behavior standards should be distributed to each participant requiring signatures to indicate they have read and understand what is expected of them. It should be mandatory that at least one parent/guardian attend this meeting with the participant.
- All groups traveling domestically and abroad should view the DVD "Safe Passage," which provides excellent tips on safe travel. It can be viewed on the Insurance Office Website.
- Participants should be reminded to bring along any prescription medications or other health items regularly used such as allergy medications or contact solutions.
- Training should be provided for the type of work and the equipment being used prior to the trip, especially if the work involves repair or construction activities.

### During the Trip

- Proper supervision must be provided at all times. What is considered "proper" could vary according to the age of the participants and the type of activity. The greater the ratio of supervision, the better. **Following are the recommended chaperone to child ratios:**
  1. For children in the pre-kindergarten level to the third grade level, the recommendation will be one adult per every 5 children. (As a rule of thumb, the younger the children, the greater the number of adult chaperones required.)
  2. For children from grade four to grade eight, the recommendation will be one adult per every 8 children.
  3. For youth from grade nine to grade twelve, the recommendation will be one adult for every 10 minor participants.
- Participants should be divided into smaller groups with a designated adult leader. A binder with medical release forms and emergency contact names/numbers for each individual should be carried by the designated group leader at all times in case an injury occurs.
- Since these trips usually involve some types of repair or construction, the safety of the work-site should be determined. It is important to be aware of your surroundings at all times. There are certain job/duties that would be considered unacceptable for particular age groups. **Attached is a list of acceptable and unacceptable work activities according to age.**

- Depending upon the type of job or equipment used, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be needed for the task. All PPE should be provided by the group leader.
- Participants should dress appropriately for the work they are doing and according to the customs and dress standards of the country in which they are working. Shoes must be worn at all times. Long pants should be worn for any construction type activity.
- A well-stocked first aid kit should be present at the work site. Supplies should be replenished as needed.
- Rest breaks should be given to participants as needed. Meals should be provided as well as an adequate amount of fluids to ensure proper hydration.
- Be aware of the conditions of local tap water. Boiled or bottled water as well as bottled or canned beverages are safest. Select foods carefully and avoid raw foods that can't be peeled or boiled.

### **Transportation**

Commercial carrier or contracted transportation is the most desirable method to be used and whenever possible, this mode of transportation should be provided. The use of private passenger vehicles is discouraged and should be avoided if at all possible. If commercial carriers are used (i.e. commercial airlines, trains or buses), no further information is required. However, if transportation is contracted, signed contracts should be executed with an appropriate hold harmless agreement protecting the parish/school and the Diocese. Also contracted carriers should provide proof of insurance with minimum limits of liability of \$2 million CSL (Combined Single Limit). If possible, contracts and agreements to be executed on a trip should be reviewed before departure by Diocesan Counsel and/or the Insurance Office.

### **Do not allow 10 - 15 passenger vans to be used for transportation. This is against Diocesan Policy.**

If a vehicle will be leased, rented or borrowed to transport participants, appropriate insurance should be obtained. Bodily injury, property damage and collision coverage should be purchased through the rental company.

If a private passenger vehicle must be used, then the following information must be supplied and this information must be certified by the driver in question.

1. The driver must be 21 years of age or older.
2. The driver must have a valid driver's license and no physical disabilities that could impair his driving abilities.
3. The vehicle must have valid and current registration and license plates.
4. The vehicle must be insured for bodily injury, and property damage, and proof of current coverage must be provided.

The attached Driver Information Sheet for each driver must be obtained prior to the trip. Each driver and/or chaperon should be given a copy of the approved itinerary including the route to be followed and a summary of responsibilities.

With the exception of commercial or contracted transportation, the daily maximum miles driven should not exceed 500 miles per vehicle. Also, the maximum number of

consecutive miles driven should not exceed 250 miles per driver without at least a 30 minute break.

Parish and school entities that are in violation of this policy will be responsible for payment of any claims and their expenses that arise due to those violations.

Should you have any questions regarding this memo, please contact Rick Osorio in the Insurance Office at extension 393.

Thank you.

Ed. 7/2012



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